STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES FOR TRACING AND REUNIFICATION OF UNACCOMPANIED AND SEPARATED CHILDREN FROM THE DRC IN UGANDA

## Inter-Agency Child Protection Working Group, UGANDA

# I - BACKGROUND

1. This document outlines the working procedures with Unaccompanied and Separated Children[[1]](#footnote-0) entering into Uganda coming from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The Inter-Agency approach will be implemented both for (i) cross-border tracing and reunification i.e. Uganda and the DRC and (ii) in-country tracing and reunification namely in Nyakabande, Matanda, Nakivale, Kyangwali and any other camps/settlements established for the purpose of hosting refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo.
2. All the members of the Inter Agency Child Protection Working Group (CPWG) agreed to adhere to the Inter Agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children and thereby the members will harmonize activities and interventions accordingly[[2]](#footnote-1) [[3]](#footnote-2).
3. The SOPs may be adapted /adjusted to fit future emergency situations.

# II - OBJECTIVE

1. The overall objective of the Standard Operation Procedures (SOPs) is to:
2. Put in writing the Inter-Agency agreement on the procedures of tracing and reunification of UASC adopted during the Child Protection Meeting of January 15, 2009 in Nakivale[[4]](#footnote-3).
3. Ensure that the internationally agreed standards clearly formulated in the Inter Agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children are implemented in the process of tracing and reunifying the families separated due to the displacement resulting from the fighting in Eastern DC., who are living in Uganda.
4. Ensure that the Agencies are working within the spirit of complementarity and cooperation and that each member knows its role for which the agency stands accountable in the process of (i) tracing and reunification and (ii) alternative care arrangements.

# III – PROCEDURES

## 1. TRACING AND REUNIFICATION

**1.1. Tracing and reunification - within Uganda**

1. Save the Children in Uganda (SCiUG) is the lead Agency amongst the working group members on tracing within Nakivale, Matanda, Nyakabande camps/settlements established for the purpose of responding to the DRC 2008-09 crisis. For Kyangwali SCiUG shall not establish regular presence but will support and build the capacity of local actors to respond to the crisis. As relevant and on the basis of needs, the Uganda Red Cross Society (URCS) will also conduct in-country tracing activities for UASC’S and other vulnerable populations within camps/settlements and outside the above-mentioned areas. UNHCR in collaboration with the designated local government authority is responsible of documenting and following up UASC’S located in Uganda host families for the purpose of establishing their legal status and facilitating monitoring of their situation.
2. SCiUG will work closely with GTZ and AAH that have already put in place structures to facilitate the process within Nakivale and Kyangwali respectively. SCiUG will take the lead on developing the tracing methodology in collaboration with other members of the CPWG. Fostering process by GTZ and AAH will start concurrently with tracing.
3. SCiUG will receive referrals from UNHCR of UASCs in concerned locations and avail the lists to its tracing and reunification teams to start the process.
4. Upon identification of the missing families / children, SCiUG will send the information to UNHCR who will ensure the transfer of the family / child to the matching location. SCiUG will handle inter-camp reunification in Nakivale. UNHCR/GTZ/AAH is responsible for receiving and documenting UASCs in transit sites and refugee settlement camps. The UASCs identified and documented by UNHCR/GTZ/AAH should immediately be brought to the attention of URCS/ICRC for possibilities of cross border tracing. SCiUG will conduct child and adult verification before reunification. The Inter agency reunification form will be filled and signed by the parents upon successful reunification. The process will be witnessed by a local leader.
5. All movement of children for reunification purpose between refugee sites in Uganda will be handled by UNHCR.
6. Information on successful tracing will be shared with UNHCR, OPM, GTZ, AAH and the members of the CPWG to (i) update the status of the family / child in UNHCR proGres data system and (ii) allow GTZ and AAH to initiate post-reunification monitoring and community follow up. GTZ and AAH will be responsible for follow up of reunified children in Nakivale and Kyangwali refugee settlement camps while UNHCR shall follow up children reunified outside GTZ and AAH operational areas
7. SCiUG is the lead agency of UASCs data management. SCiUG will design the data management system closely with the humanitarian actors to ensure smooth hand over of the system.
8. SCiUG will update the members regularly about the developments during the protection working group meetings in Nakivale, Kyangwali and Kampala respectively.

**1.2. Tracing and reunification – between Uganda and the DRC**

1. The ICRC is the lead agency for cross-border tracing.
2. The ICRC will initiate cross-border tracing upon registration of UASC’S (i.e. that which is done directly by the ICRC and/or by the URCS) as well as upon receipt of information/ lists from unsuccessful in-country tracing (i.e. from SCiUG) so long as sufficient information required for cross-border tracing is contained therein (further ICRC/URCS interviews with UASC and registration may be necessary).
3. The ICRC – directly or where relevant through the URCS - will share information on successful cross-border tracing with UNHCR and/or SCiUG. Such information may be posted on the Inter-Agency notice boards in the refugee settlements.
4. The ICRC – directly or where relevant through the URCS - will share relevant and non-confidential information on successful cross-border tracing with UNHCR, OPM, GTZ, AAH and the members of the CPWG to (i) update the status of the family / child in UNHCR proGres data system and (ii) allow GTZ and AAH to initiate post-reunification monitoring and community follow up. Information on un-successful cross-border tracing will be shared with UNHCR, OPM, GTZ, AAH and the members of the CPWG to (i) confirm the status of the family / child in UNHCR proGres data system and (ii) allow GTZ and AAH to proceed with fostering process.
5. The Inter-Agency reunification form will be filled and signed by the parents upon successful reunification. The process will be witnessed by a community leader and a member of the agency which has been involved in family tracing process.
6. The ICRC will regularly update the members – directly or where relevant through the URCS - about the developments during the protection working group meeting in Nakivale, Kyangwali and Kampala respectively or through email correspondence/telephone exchange.
7. Return of children in the country of origin for the purpose of family reunification shall only take place upon satisfactory evidence on conditions of physical safety and protection of the child and after appropriate measures for transfer; reception and protection upon arrival have been taken.

## 2. ALTERNATIVE CARE ARRANGEMENTS

1. GTZ and AAH are the lead agencies on alternative care arrangements for UASC within Nakivale and Kyangwali refugee settlements.
2. During the process of tracing, GTZ and AAH will make sure that the children are enjoying suitable alternative care arrangement based on child best interest determination initially, and ongoing monitoring of the situation.
3. GTZ and AAH will do child best interest determination and provide alternative care arrangement for the children concurrently with the tracing process, both in-country and cross border. In case of fostering, foster parents will be required to sign the Inter-Agency foster care placement agreement for interim care arrangements, with an understanding that if the child’s own family is traced, reunification is to go ahead.
4. UASCs who already stay with a spontaneous or designated foster family will be left to stay with that family, if positively assessed by GTZ and AAH and for as long as the child is willing to stay in the family. The family will sign the inter-agency care agreement if not already completed.
5. Placement of UASC in a foster family in the host country through local integration or resettlement in a third country through inter-country adoption shall only take place if deemed in the best interest of the child and after satisfactory evidence that family reunification or another care option in the condition of dignity and safety is not possible in the country of origin.
6. For children crossing into Uganda from the DRC and documented at transit sites as UASC the initial tracing process for relatives in refugee settlement camps shall ideally commence before the child departs from the transit site, so the child can be reunited with family in Uganda without delay. For UASC who already have been relocated to refugee settlement camps before successful tracing, GTZ and AAH shall find alternative care arrangements for these children while tracing is ongoing.
7. GTZ and AAH will follow up on the children reunited with their families and closely monitor those placed under an alternative care arrangement.
8. GTZ and AAH will regularly give updates about any child protection developments during the protection working group meetings.

**Kampala, July, 2009**

N.B. These Standard Operating procedures are adapted from those developed by the Inter-Agency Child Protection Working Group, UGANDA, 2009

1. Unaccompanied children 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 care-giver, but not necessarily from other relatives. These may, therefore, include children accompanied by other adult family members. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. <http://www.unhcr.ch/include/fckeditor/custom/File/IAPUnaccompaniedChildren_e.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Uganda Red Cross Society (URCS) participate as observers (rather than members) in the CPWG. They also conduct activities aimed at Restoring Family Links (RFL) according to their respective mandates and internal procedures and adhere to the Inter Agency Guiding Principles. In Uganda, the URCS actively conducts the majority of in-country RFL activities (with technical support from the ICRC where relevant), while the ICRC undertakes cross-border tracing i.e. for unaccompanied or separated refugee children, in coordination with the Central Tracing Agency in Geneva, and with relevant neighboring delegations. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. Minutes of the Nakivale Interagency meeting are available upon request

   [↑](#footnote-ref-3)