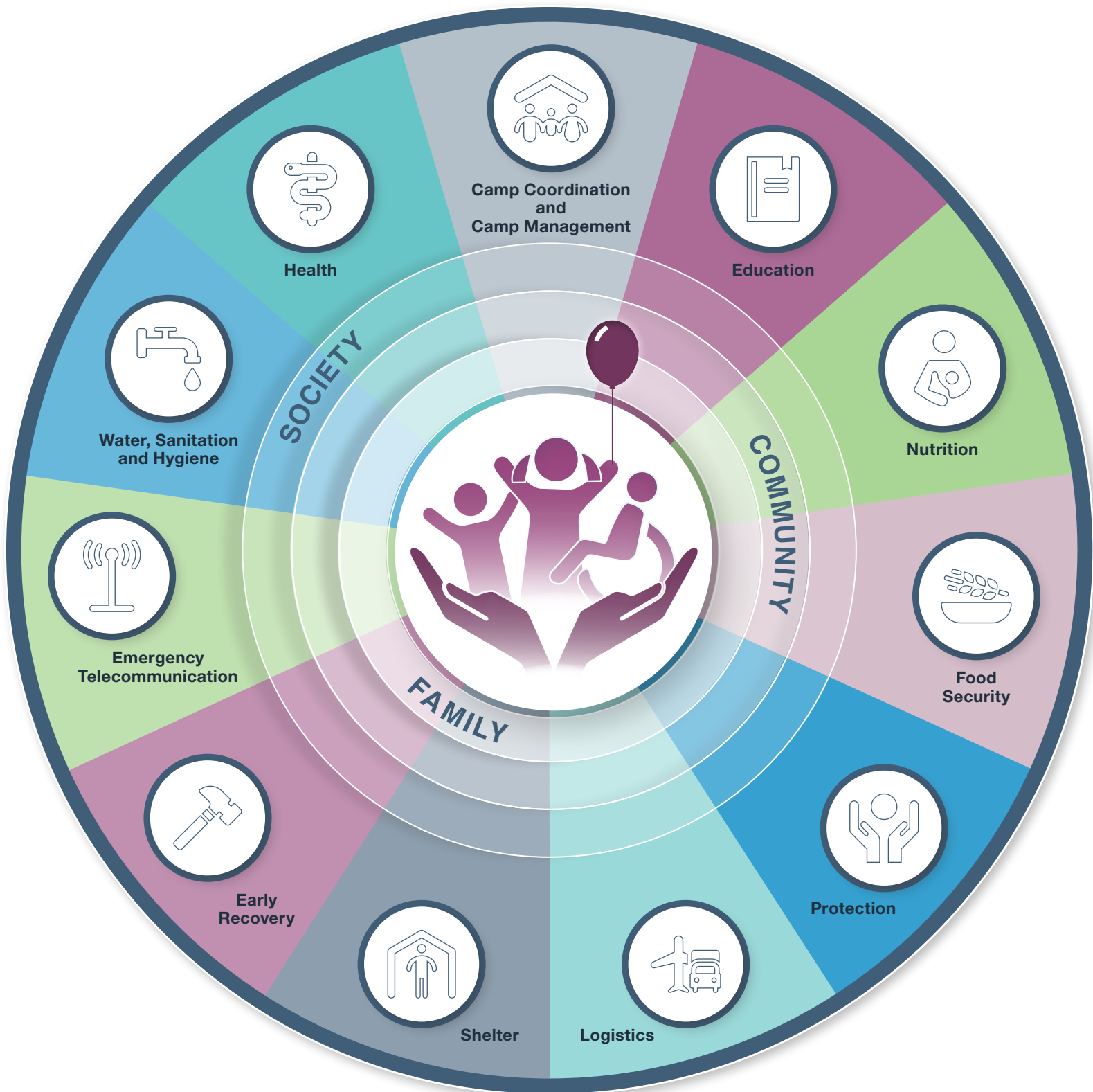




**THE CENTRALITY OF CHILDREN & THEIR PROTECTION
IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION**



The Centrality of Children and their Protection in Humanitarian Action – A Visual and Written Introduction

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Children are disproportionately affected by humanitarian crises.¹ They are a distinct group from adults, with unique needs and capacities that vary by age, gender, ability, legal status, and other individual characteristics. Leaders and champions for human rights have heralded that the true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its children.

Children are a significant group of rights holders, as set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Their rights are inter-connected, and a holistic approach is needed by actors across the humanitarian system to ensure their realization. This is where centrality of children in humanitarian action becomes critical.

Among other rights, children have the right to be protected from abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence, and prevention and response to these form the foundation of the child protection sector. However, by nature, abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence can only be fully addressed when all sectoral actors work hand in hand to address the root causes of violence.

Children also have the right to exercise their agency in decisions that concern them. They can play a vital role in protecting themselves and their peers and in identifying and helping adults and peers to understand protection needs. Children's idea and views, often stemming from their direct experiences, lead to more effective, relevant and sustainable decisions on programmes and policies that serve them. All humanitarian actors have the obligation to support the realization of this right.

By its very nature, realising the protection of children and their full array of rights further helps ensure the well-being of whole societies. As children are embedded in an ecosystem of families, communities, and the broader society, Ensuring children's well-being cannot be achieved without also investing in the whole system.

Children, in all their diversity

Within this document 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**, including infants / early childhood (under age 5), middle childhood (ages 5-12, or 'school aged'), and all stages of adolescence;
- Children of all **sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions**;
- children with diverse **abilities and disabilities**; and
- Children with **other diversity factors**, 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.

¹ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-new-york/children-crisis-spotlight-underfunded-humanitarian-emergencies_en#:~:text=Children%20are%20disproportionately%20affected%20by,their%20survival%2C%20growth%20and%20development.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY THE CENTRALITY OF CHILDREN AND THEIR PROTECTION?

The centrality of children and their protection in humanitarian action is a shared responsibility, to ensure the entire humanitarian system is actively and consciously engaged in realising broader child rights as well as children’s right to protection in each step of humanitarian action. It goes beyond the mainstreaming of child protection² and requires a whole-of-system focus on children’s protection and well-being. Every single person contributing to and working as part of the humanitarian system has a role to play.

The centrality of children means considering the views, capacities, needs and vulnerabilities of children in all aspects of humanitarian response, within all sectoral interventions. It includes emphasising the perspectives and agency of children, in all their diversity, and advocating for stronger inclusion, participation and prioritisation of children within humanitarian programmes, policies and decision-making.

The centrality of children’s protection means that all humanitarian actors are accountable towards children’s rights to protection. State actors hold the primary responsibility to protect children and realise their rights as set out within the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, all actors have a role to play in systematically placing children at the centre of humanitarian action, and to prioritise protection and accountability to children throughout humanitarian action. This includes within the Interagency Standing Committee’s (IASC)³ policies, situation and context analyses, assessments and reports, humanitarian and refugee response plans, and funding appeals.

WHAT DOES CENTRALITY OF CHILDREN AND THEIR PROTECTION MEAN FOR HUMANITARIAN ACTORS?⁴

Turning the concept of the centrality of children and their protection into reality requires a collective effort across the humanitarian system. Concrete actions by diverse stakeholder groups can contribute to this step change, including:

1. **Humanitarian leadership, including Humanitarian Coordinators and Humanitarian Country Teams** make the protection of all children a strategic objective in humanitarian action, and a collective outcome that the humanitarian response is accountable for integrating across the response. This can be considered a ‘child lens’ to the obligations of humanitarian stakeholders to the Centrality of Protection and in particular the implementation of the IASC Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action.

² Child protection is defined as the ‘prevention of and response to abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence against children’. As described on page 19 in: http://alliancecpha.org/en/CPMS_home

³ <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/>

⁴ Humanitarian actors, national partners and donors can find key actionable steps to support the centrality of children and their protection in the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (CPMS). The eight standards of CPMS Pillar 4: Working Across Sectors provide specific guidance on how health, education, camp management, food security and other sectoral actors can integrate children’s protection through all phases of humanitarian response.

2. **Humanitarian workers from child protection and other sectors, including coordinators and programme specialists:** Health, education, food security, livelihoods, camp coordination and camp management, and other sectoral actors, play a critical role in prioritising children’s safety and well-being, identifying children with protection concerns, and preventing harm. Working across sectors with a ‘child lens’ will make vast contributions towards achieving child-centred humanitarian programming. This will require: a) for all humanitarian sectors to systematically consider the capacities, needs and vulnerabilities of children in their programming, including through children’s own participation, and b) consider contributions of each sector to protection and well-being of children, including through working with child protection actors.
3. **Humanitarian donors:** They play a critical and enabling role. This can be through supporting multi-sector and multi-year flexible funding, which contributes to child protection outcomes. Donors should require funding partners to adhere to the Minimum Standards for **Child Protection** in Humanitarian Action and promote the use of programmatic approaches that are child-sensitive and -informed. Investments should be made to support capacity strengthening and capacity sharing efforts for a range of child protection and other sector actors to implement quality programming that enhances the protection and well-being of children.

CALL TO ACTION

We call upon the leadership of the humanitarian architecture, decision makers within humanitarian organizations, and donors to take up their commitments to children and their protection as a central element of all humanitarian action. Children are not only the largest population group affected by humanitarian crises, but they also are the most vulnerable to the impacts of the humanitarian crises. Therefore, a just humanitarian system should include a strong consideration for children’s capacities, needs and vulnerabilities.

Through working together, including across sectors and across all levels of the humanitarian system, we can achieve better quality programming, improved outcomes, and greater accountability to affected children and their families.

Effective leadership and collective coordination by all, including supporting Humanitarian Coordinators and actors across the humanitarian ‘architecture’, is required if we are to design a humanitarian response that delivers on the rights of children and contributes to their well-being.

Prioritizing children's needs and protection in humanitarian responses is not only a moral imperative but also a cost-effective investment in the future. By investing in children's well-being and protection, we can build stronger and more resilient, families, communities and societies that can recover and thrive after crises.