

Briefing Note: The Impact of UN80, the Humanitarian Reset, and Funding Cuts on the Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) Agenda

Purpose of this Brief

This note outlines how ongoing reforms, in particular the [Humanitarian Reset](#) and [UN80 Initiative](#), underpinned by deepening funding cuts, risk undermining the Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) agenda. It provides recommendations to ensure that critical gains that have been made to address the specific vulnerabilities of children in armed conflict are safeguarded and not reversed.

INTRODUCTION

The number and intensity of armed conflicts are rising, placing children at heightened risks of violence, abuse, exploitation, and neglect. Today, more than one in six children globally live in conflict zones - nearly double the proportion in 1990¹. The 2025 Secretary-General's Annual Report on children and armed conflict,² presenting information on grave violations³ committed against children across 25 conflict situations and one regional monitoring arrangement, reported the highest number of grave violations ever verified since the Security Council mandated Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism was established 20 years ago.

Widespread disregard for International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and International Human Rights Law (IHRL) in armed conflicts has led to an alarming rise in grave violations against children with devastating consequences: children are being killed, maimed, recruited and used by armed forces and groups, abducted, subjected to sexual violence, and denied humanitarian aid. Hospitals and schools are attacked or used for military purposes, while humanitarian aid is deliberately blocked, further endangering children's lives and rights. These trends unfold against dramatic budget cuts, including for child protection actors, and an increasing disregard for international law and protection standards.

¹ Data - Stop the War on Children (Save the Children, 2025)

² Secretary-General Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict, available at <https://docs.un.org/en/S/2025/247> (17 June 2025)

³ The six grave violations are: killing and maiming of children; recruitment or use of children; rape and other forms of sexual violence against children; abduction of children; attacks against schools or hospitals; and denial of humanitarian access for children.

IMPACT OF REFORMS ON THE CAAC AGENDA

Against this backdrop, the humanitarian sector and the UN's peace and protection architecture are undergoing a period of significant reform and financial pressure. This section will explore how funding cuts more broadly, as well as two reform initiatives - UN80 and the Humanitarian Rest, have direct implications for the Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) Agenda.

Acute Funding Crisis: Humanitarian budgets are being cut, and these cuts are directly affecting the CAAC Agenda. Humanitarian presence across all sectors is critical for building trust with communities, which in turn enables the monitoring and reporting of grave violations. When that presence is reduced, this ability is severely weakened. Furthermore, budget cuts are dismantling or suspending programmes vital for preventing and responding to grave violations - for example, across multiple contexts, child protection actors have had to halt child protection case management services, psychosocial support, and interventions for children associated with armed forces and armed groups, amongst others⁴. Compounding these cuts to programmes are major reductions in child protection staffing capacities, especially front-line staff such as caseworkers, as well as technical advisors, further compromising the quality and effectiveness of prevention and response services.

***Impact on CAAC Agenda:** Budget cuts have led to reduced advocacy, programming, and field presence, weakening monitoring and response capacities at country level. This limits the ability of humanitarian actors to document grave violations against children and to deliver essential protection services to those affected by armed conflict.*

UN80 Initiative: This flagship reform process in the lead up to the UN's 80th anniversary (UN80) is aimed at streamlining the UN in response to the persistent funding challenges it faces. As part of this, workstream three of this initiative focuses on "Changing Structures and Realigning Programmes".

In the recently published workstream progress report, the Secretary-General proposes to review and make proposals to Member States regarding his approximately 30 special envoys, representatives, coordinators, and advisers, both thematic and geographic "to create greater impact across the UN system and reduce costly duplication at the senior leadership level".⁵ As part of the UN80 initiative, some proposed reforms focus on potentially restructuring the UN protection architecture and the merging of multiple mandates into a single entity, including a proposed merging of several protection mandates (Children in Armed Conflict, Sexual Violence in Conflict, Violence against Children, Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect).

⁴https://alliancecpha.org/sites/default/files/technical/attachments/Global%20impact%20of%20funding%20cuts%20on%20children%20and%20their%20protection%20in%20humanitarian%20contexts_English__0.pdf

⁵Report of the Secretary-General, UN80 INITIATIVE, Workstream 3: Changing Structures and Realigning Programme, Shifting Paradigms: United to Deliver, 18 September 2025, para. 62. Full report available at: https://www.un.org/un80-initiative/sites/default/files/2025-09/UN80_WS3-1_250918_1901.pdf

Impact on the CAAC Agenda: *Merging the CAAC mandate with other protection mandates would erode its specialised focus on children in conflict and weaken its Security Council-anchored peace and security character. The CAAC mandate, like others, is the result of hard-won diplomatic achievements and forms part of the bedrock of international protection frameworks. In the face of today’s unprecedented scale of conflict, it is vital that CAAC remains distinct, safeguarded, and strengthened, and not diluted in the name of efficiency.*

In the same progress report, it is specified that for future peace operations, steps would be taken to delegate relevant programmatic tasks such as rule of law, governance and child protection – and the associated resources – to UN system entities best equipped to deliver them to allow missions and entities to exercise their comparative advantage and avoid duplication.⁶

Impact on the CAAC Agenda: *UN peace operations are central to implementing the Children and Armed Conflict agenda. They co-chair Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMR), verify grave violations, advocate for prevention, advise missions on child protection, including in peace processes, and provide security, logistics, and access in conflict areas. Their effectiveness depends on strong mandates, dedicated expertise, and systematic integration of child protection across mission activities.*

A complete handover of child protection tasks for future missions to UN system entities would be problematic. Child protection in peace operations is not only programmatic: it entails collaboration across mission components to mainstream child protection, the monitoring and reporting of grave violations, advising leadership, negotiating with armed forces and groups to prevent and end violations, strengthening national capacities, and training mission personnel. These functions cannot be replicated by external UN entities, whose resources are already under severe strain.

This risk is particularly acute during mission transitions and withdrawals, when child protection capacities are often the first to be compromised—resulting in verification backlogs, weakened dialogue with parties to conflict, and the reversal of hard-won progress. Early and integrated planning is essential to sustain these functions and avoid rolling back years of progress.

Humanitarian Reset: In response to severe funding constraints, the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) has initiated a humanitarian reset to enhance the efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability of humanitarian action. A hyper prioritised Global Humanitarian Overview (GHO) was released⁷, where Humanitarian Coordinators were asked to prioritise “life-saving interventions,” and now targets only 64% of the total people targeted for humanitarian assistance in 2025 (114 million out of the initial planned 178.7 million). Furthermore, the consolidation of the Child Protection Area of Responsibility into a one single Protection Cluster (which will also have oversight of issues previously covered by the Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Mine Action Areas of Responsibility), poses a risk to technical child protection coordination at country level, which is critical to coordinate programming to prevent and respond to grave violations, should guardrails not be put in place.

⁶ Report of the Secretary-General, UN80 INITIATIVE, Workstream 3: Changing Structures and Realigning Programme, Shifting Paradigms: United to Deliver, 18 September 2025, para. 62. Full report available at: https://www.un.org/un80-initiative/sites/default/files/2025-09/UN80_WS3-1_250918_1901.pdf

⁷ <https://humanitarianaction.info/document/hyper-prioritized-global-humanitarian-overview-2025-cruel-math-aid-cuts/article/hyper-prioritized-global-humanitarian-overview-cruel-math-aid-cuts#page-title>

Impact on the CAAC Agenda: *Despite the fact that child protection programming has been recognised as life-saving throughout the humanitarian system, it is often not treated as such in practice. The narrowing of humanitarian aid to a “life-saving” framing risks disproportionately impacting child protection and broader humanitarian programming that prevents and responds to grave violations, as humanitarian actors are compelled to hyper prioritise those interventions which are more universally accepted as life-saving (such as water and food distributions) amid resource constraints. Reductions in humanitarian programming across all sectors also result in reduced programmatic presence on the ground as well as ability to monitor, verify and respond to grave violations.*

Why the CAAC Agenda Must Remain Distinct and Prioritised

- **Promoting Compliance with International Law:** In an era of historic disregard for international humanitarian and human rights law and impunity for violations, the CAAC agenda provides powerful tools to promote compliance with international law to protect children affected by armed conflict.
- **United Nations global mandate:** Created by GA resolution and reinforced by over a dozen SC resolutions, the CAAC agenda is central to the global peace and security architecture.
- **Direct accountability tools:** CAAC mechanisms and tools enable UN engagement with parties to conflict through unique agreed upon tools (including action plans, handover protocols, and prevention plans) negotiated by the United Nations with parties to conflict based on documented and verified grave violations against children. These tools do not exist within broader human rights mechanisms and would be hard to replicate.
- **Operational leverage:** Child Protection Advisors (CPAs) in peacekeeping missions and humanitarian child protection staff provide protection by presence, monitoring and reporting, and advocacy capacity that is unique and irreplaceable.
- **Children at record risk:** 2024 saw the highest number of verified grave violations since the set-up of the UN Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism with a 25% increase compared to 2023 – which had previously represented the highest number of grave violations ever recorded. Cuts and reforms now would mean less monitoring, less reporting, less visibility, less engagement with armed actors, less accountability, and greater impunity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Protect and preserve the CAAC Mandate: Leadership, Resourcing, and Monitoring Capacity

- **Maintain an independent and senior-level Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) for CAAC**, given the mandate from the Security Council and General Assembly, and its centrality to the global peace and security architecture.
- **Ensure that the CAAC mandate remains distinct from human rights-led structures** in order to preserve its peace and security character, maintain direct access to the UN Security Council, and safeguard its operational and political effectiveness.
- **Secure predictable, multi-year financing for the CAAC mandate**, especially at field level, ensuring a well-resourced Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) on grave violations and also the capacity to follow up through direct engagement with armed forces and groups, including via field visits, and the development, monitoring, and implementation of Action Plans.
- **Embed CAAC in mission transitions**: Ensure child protection expertise is integrated into UNCTs during mission drawdowns, maintaining full functionality of monitoring and reporting of grave violations against children and child protection commitments. Adequate resources should be allocated to the UN Country Teams to sustain MRM functions, support the release of children and continue to engage with parties to conflict on action plans and to monitor progress on existing action plans.
- **Strengthen partnerships**: Preserve cooperation between peacekeeping and political missions, UNICEF, humanitarian child protection actors, and local counterparts to maintain accountability and response capacity.

2. Protect Funding for Child Protection Programming to Prevent and Respond to Grave Violations

- **Prioritise and fund programmes to prevent and respond to grave violations**: Ensure that programmatic prevention and response measures for grave violations are prioritised and adequately funded across humanitarian and peace operations, without reductions in frontline staff that would compromise essential child protection services as well as contributions to monitoring and reporting.
- **Recognise child protection as life-saving** within the Humanitarian Reset, ensuring CAAC-related prevention and response services as well as monitoring and reporting are explicitly prioritised and protected from cuts.
- **Safeguard peace operations child protection capacity**: Protect child protection capacity, including Senior Child Protection Adviser (CPA) posts and child protection units in mission budgets, including in context of mission transitions and withdrawals, with dedicated GA Fifth Committee resources.

CONCLUSION

The CAAC agenda faces multiple converging pressures: UN80-mandated restructuring, the Humanitarian Reset, unprecedented disregard for international humanitarian and human rights law, and major budget constraints. Without strong advocacy, reform decisions risk undoing two decades of progress—weakening the collection and visibility of timely information on grave violations against children, limiting the ability to implement programmes to prevent and respond to these violations, and ultimately undermining efforts to end impunity.

Acknowledgements:

The development of this briefing note was led by Elspeth Chapman and Amanda Brydon. Critical inputs and feedback were provided by key individuals and organisation across the Alliance and we are deeply grateful for these valuable inputs. The development of this briefing note was made possible by generous funding support from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Government of Canada, and Education Cannot Wait (ECW).

Suggested citation: The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, Briefing Note: The Impact of UN80, the Humanitarian Reset, and Funding Cuts on the Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) Agenda (2025).

© The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action

For more information on the Alliance's work and joining the network, please visit www.alliancecpha.org or contact us directly: info@alliancecpha.org.