



**THE ALLIANCE**  
FOR CHILD PROTECTION  
IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

# Child Protection in a Resource-Constrained World: From Challenges in Financing to Innovative Solutions



UNICEF/Andrianantenaina

**Child-Friendly Background Paper for the 2026 Annual Meeting for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action**

## DEFINITIONS

### What is a Humanitarian Crisis?

A humanitarian crisis is an event or series of events that poses a critical threat to the health, safety, security, and/or well-being of a large group of people. This can be a problem inside a country or between countries. Humanitarian crises can be caused by wars, widespread diseases, famine, and natural hazards like earthquakes, floods, and cyclones.

### What is Child Protection in Humanitarian Action?

It is the **prevention** of and **response** to abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence against children in emergencies.<sup>1</sup>



### Who are the Humanitarian Actors?

**Humanitarian actors** are people who work with children, families, and communities during emergencies. Many of them work directly with children to keep them safe and supported. Depending on the context, this may include organisations, government workers, international organisations, and people who help make decisions, give money or supplies, organise support, share information, and speak up for children.

Humanitarian actors can also include people who work in the justice system, at borders and immigration offices, and in security roles, when their work affects children and families.

<sup>1</sup> Read more about Child Protection Risks in Emergencies: [https://alliancecpa.org/sites/default/files/technical/attachments/Child\\_Protection\\_Risks\\_in\\_Emergencies.pdf](https://alliancecpa.org/sites/default/files/technical/attachments/Child_Protection_Risks_in_Emergencies.pdf)



### Who is the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action?

The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, called “**The Alliance**”, works to keep children safe from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence, especially during emergencies. Its mission is to help people and organisations provide strong and effective support to protect children. The Alliance is a global network of organisations, researchers, policymakers, donors, and child protection workers who work together, share knowledge, set standards, and give guidance to improve child protection.

## INTRODUCTION

All over the world, children and adolescents are among the most vulnerable to harm from emergencies. Many face different dangers every day as they live through emergencies such as war, violence, floods, droughts, and displacement. Armed conflict and climate disasters put more children at risk of violence, exploitation, neglect, and abuse. Many children are growing up in places where fighting or violence is happening nearby, and families are forced to leave their homes. Schools, hospitals, and playgrounds are often damaged or closed, making it harder to get food, water, healthcare, and other basic needs.

Today, about **1 in every 5 children in the world** lives in or near places affected by conflict. This means millions of girls and boys are growing up surrounded by danger. There are organisations and people who work to protect children and support their families during emergencies, but many do not have enough money or resources to do so. Because of this, some child protection programs are closing, reducing their services, or working with fewer staff. As a result of that, **millions of children** are not getting the help when they need it.

These problems are happening while big changes are being made in how humanitarian help is organised and funded. These changes affect who gets help, what kind of help is provided, and how decisions are made. Meanwhile, important international laws meant to protect children are being ignored more often. When these laws are not respected, it becomes harder to keep children safe and to make sure people are held responsible when they harm children. However, even in this context, people who work to protect children are not giving up. They continue to find new ways to help, work with communities, and protect children's well-being, even when resources are limited and challenges are great. They are doing their best for now, even if they may not be able to do it for very long.

## THE HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM FACES AN ACUTE FUNDING CRISIS

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### **The Humanitarian System is Facing a Serious Lack of Money to Help People in Emergencies**

Right now, there is not enough money to help everyone who needs support during emergencies. This is mostly because some governments that used to financially support humanitarian organisations started shifting their money away from humanitarian response in 2025. Many organisations that help children in crisis do not have the funding they need. Because of this, they can now only help a smaller number of children, even though many more are in need. When there is less money, humanitarian aid focuses only on the most visible needs to survive. This means that some people who are still in danger, but whose needs are less visible, may not get support. Children are often less visible. Some child protection services have had to reduce the work that they do, stop certain activities, or close completely, sometimes very suddenly. This means that many children who were already at risk are now losing important support that helps keep them safe and cared for.

## INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN AND HUMAN RIGHTS LAW UNDER ATTACK

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### **International Laws that Protect People's Rights during Emergencies are being Followed Less and Less**

There are international rules and laws that are meant to protect children during wars and emergencies. These rules say that children should be kept safe and that schools, hospitals, and aid workers should not be attacked. However, these rules are being broken more often, especially in places where there is fighting.

Because of this, many children are being hurt during conflicts. Some children are injured or killed, some are taken away from their families, and others are forced to join armed groups. Schools and hospitals are also being attacked, which makes it harder for children to learn and get medical care.

In many places, aid workers are being blocked from helping people. When help cannot reach communities, children suffer the most. They may not be able to go to school, see a doctor, or get the support they need to stay safe and healthy. When the rules meant to protect people are ignored, children are put in greater

danger. This is why it is so important that everyone respects these laws and works together to protect children, especially during times of crisis.

## HUMANITARIAN ARCHITECTURE REFORMS AND A CHANGING OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

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### Changes in How Humanitarian Help is Organised and Works

The way help is organised during emergencies is changing because there is less money available. Some systems that used to focus especially on keeping children safe are now being combined with broader protection work. This can make it harder to focus on children's specific needs and to make sure experts who protect children get the support they need.

In some countries, international organisations are also stepping back from helping to organise emergency responses, even though many people still need support. This is happening because of funding cuts and changes in priorities.

These changes can put child protection services at risk. When there is less coordination, less funding, and less support, important services that help keep children safe may be reduced or stopped. This is worrying because many children are still facing violence, exploitation, and neglect.

Even as these changes happen, protecting children must remain a top priority. Children have the right to be safe, cared for, and protected, especially during emergencies.

### Impact on Child Protection Programming

Child protection workers from more than 50 humanitarian contexts report that funding cuts are having immediate and serious effects on children and on the services meant to protect them. Many programs are closing or reducing their work. As a result, children are losing access to important services such as case management, mental health support, family tracing and reunification, legal aid, community-based prevention interventions, and other critical child protection services.

In some places, services have stopped suddenly. When this happens, children face higher risks of child labour, child marriage, recruitment by armed groups, sexual exploitation, and trafficking. Children may also experience serious mental health distress and feel very sad, scared, or overwhelmed. The situation is especially difficult for the most vulnerable children, including children with disabilities, children on the move, and children who are separated from their families.

Protecting children depends on many professionals working together. Frontline workers, such as caseworkers and community facilitators, play an important role in identifying risks and working directly with children and families. Supervisors, technical advisors, coordinators, and managers provide guidance, supervision, and quality support. When there are fewer frontline workers and less technical support, it becomes harder to deliver quality child protection programs and services. Over time, these challenges can weaken child protection systems and slow progress toward local and sustainable responses. If these

pressures continue, progress made in strengthening child protection systems could be lost, and efforts to build strong, local solutions may take longer.

## CROSS-SECTORAL IMPACTS AND THE EROSION OF CHILDREN'S PROTECTIVE ENVIRONMENTS

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### How Changes in Many Services Affect Children's Safety

**Cuts in funding** are affecting many important programs that support child protection and the well-being of children and adolescents, such as education, food, health, nutrition, water, hygiene and sanitation. In many places affected by crises, some programs have been reduced or closed. This includes programs that work together to help prevent risks for children. When schools and learning spaces are closed or reduced, children lose more than education. Schools also give children structure, safe supervision, emotional support, and help adults notice when a child may be in danger.

When these services are reduced, children face higher risks of child labour, early marriage, recruitment by armed groups, and other forms of violence. Cuts to food and health services also make children more vulnerable. They can increase hunger, illness, and stress, and reduce access to mental health support. These changes make life harder for children and their caregivers and can undo progress that was made to support and protect children during emergencies.

## CONCLUSION

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Today, many children around the world are facing more problems and dangers during emergencies. There is less money to provide services. Important rules meant to protect people are being respected less and less, and the way help is organised is changing. All of this makes it harder to keep children safe and puts more pressure on the systems that protect them.

Even with these challenges, people who work to protect children are doing their best. They are working together, using what they know, and finding new ways to continue important services and reduce harm to children. New ideas and better ways of working can help, but they cannot replace the need for strong support from leaders and governments to protect children's rights. Understanding what is happening and how things are changing is important. It helps adults make better decisions and find the right ways to protect children in different situations.