Children who are at risk of their protection rights being violated

Annex 3 of the [Supporting Integrated Child Protection and Education in Humanitarian Action Guidance Note](#) as referenced in the [Child Protection Minimum Standards (CPMS)](#).
Updated October, 2025

Protection risks of children, their families, and their communities are exponentially compounded and increased during crises. Understanding historical and crisis-specific vulnerabilities and disparities in services allows both sectors to approach planning, interventions, and policy-making from a more informed perspective.

As both sectors explore programmatic interventions, consider the following questions:
- How do these specific circumstances and experiences of each high-risk population impact a child's ability to safely and fully access and participate in learning?
- What are the specific barriers or challenges that prevent or limit access and participation?
- Are existing learning interventions able to accommodate children's specific protection and learning needs with no, little, or substantial additional inputs? What inputs are required?
- Are government policies and school cultures/infrastructure welcoming, explicitly mitigate protection risks, and foster equity now and for the future?

Consider the specific needs of the following At Risk Children. The list represents only some At Risk children. Each response needs to identify and analyze specific groups and risks.

ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH

For this Guidance Note, the focus is on children up through secondary level education which is typically ages 9-18. Every aspect of the work supporting children up to age 18 should provide skills relevant to young adulthood and empower them to both claim their rights and use them to continue building their own resilience and essential skills. Adolescence and youth are important periods of brain development, where protective environments can support children's future success and even mitigate the impact of adversity experienced in younger childhood. Humanitarian actors must consider the specific perspectives and needs of adolescents in both outreach and programming. Program delivery through schools and community-level groups may not always reach adolescents, especially those most vulnerable or marginalized prior to the crisis.

Adolescents and youth may feel caught between childhood and adulthood. They may not want to participate in 'children's activities', and they may not be considered mature or old enough to participate in adult-led decision-making and wider community-level activities. Both child protection and education sectors must focus on adolescents' capacities and their contributions to humanitarian responses in addition to their needs. In integrated programs, the sectors need to provide protective learning opportunities as well as address age-specific risk factors such as increased risk-taking behavior or sexual and gender-based violence. There are significant opportunities to introduce and build behaviors and skills of adolescents and youth through targeted integrated programming as well as specifically mobilizing and building the capacities of adolescents and youth to support the protection and continued learning of younger children.

Consider: What opportunities exist or can be created for adolescents to design and support programs for themselves, younger children, and their communities? How are the aspirations and strengths of adolescents and youth lifted up in assessments and incorporated into response plans?

Resources

Evidence on Learning Outcomes for Adolescents in Fragile Contexts: A Landscape Analysis (INEE, 2022)

On the Precipice of Progress: National policy openings that increase forcibly displaced adolescent and youth enrollment and retention in secondary education (SEWG, 2024)

Shifting Power to Young People - How Young People Can Lead And Drive Solutions in Humanitarian Action (ActionAid International, Restless Development, 2019)

With Us and For Us: Working with and for Young People in Humanitarian and Protracted Crises (NRC, UNICEF, 2020)

Lost Opportunity: Education for out-of-school youth in emergency and protracted settings (NORCAP, 2024)

YOUNGER CHILDREN (EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION)

Early childhood covers the ages from 0-8 years. For the purposes of this Guidance Note, the focus is on ages 3-8 as it covers pre-school through early years of primary education. Crisis contexts significantly increase potential protection risks for younger children, who are in a period of rapid brain and physical growth, which may have detrimental impact on their health, well-being, and continued development. Support structures, from their relationships with caregivers and family to the systems and structures that provide essential nurturing services may be disrupted or destroyed, thus impacting their sense of stability, a means of supporting healthy relationships and development, and exposing them to increased and new protection risks. A child's early experiences affect how their brain develops and adapts to its environment and has lifelong implications on learning, resilience, and physical and mental health. Specifically, exposure to chronic adverse experiences creates toxic stress which may have a negative impact on a child's cognitive,

social-emotional, and physical health with clear consequences for their education. Investing in ECD provides greater opportunities to engage parents and caregivers more intentionally in providing and supporting both protection and early learning. Integrated programs necessarily need a multisectoral focus to ensure multiple risks and negative impacts are mitigated in a cohesive and comprehensive way. The programming space for younger children primarily extends across family and center-based interventions. At this age children are more dependent on caregivers and the impact of a crisis on a parent/caregivers' ability to be present and provide support must be part of any assessment and intervention.

Consider: How do we create opportunities for younger children who accompany older siblings to learning environments? How might community-based or home-based ECD programs transition into formal or non-formal primary education? How might adolescents and youth be engaged in supporting younger children?

Resources

[Early childhood development in humanitarian standards and guidance documents](#) (Moving Minds Alliance, 2021)

[Early Childhood Development in Emergencies Manual](#) (Save the Children, 2017)

[UNICEF's Programme Guidance for Early Childhood Development](#) (UNICEF, 2017)

[Early Childhood Development Resource Page](#) (INEE)

[Nurturing Care in Emergencies Framework](#) (WHO, 2020)

[Learning Through Play online training](#) (LEGO, 2022)

[Technical brief #5: Gender-responsive pedagogy for early childhood education](#) (VVOB, 2020)

[Young Children and the Polycrisis, Where to from Here](#) (ECDAN, 2025)

[Compendium of Resources for Family and Caregiving Strengthening in Humanitarian Settings](#) (Alliance, 2023)

CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

'Children with disabilities' includes those who have long-term physical, psychosocial, intellectual or sensory (visual and hearing) impairments. These impairments can lead to physical, communication or sociocultural barriers that limit their equal participation in society. This places them at greater risk in humanitarian settings. Children with disabilities have the same human rights as all children. The two sectors are well placed to identify and address risks and barriers that prevent children with disabilities from equally accessing quality learning opportunities. Facilities and services should be designed for all children's access and use to the greatest extent possible and should include reasonable accommodations or adjustments for children with disabilities. During the entire program cycle, the two sectors should analyze the relationships between disability and other risk factors

(such as girls with disabilities, children with disabilities who live in institutions, etc.) that may compound challenges to access to and successfully engage in learning and other services and opportunities. It is always relevant and necessary for stakeholders to disaggregate individual and qualitative data by disability, as children with disabilities are present in every context, and should be recognized through policy and practice in crisis and post-crisis programming. (CPMS Standard 31) Add that disabled children often start school later than other children if they start at all - essential to make connections with community mobilization and case management services.

Disability-inclusive education means ensuring that physical, attitudinal and financial barriers do not inhibit learners with disabilities from participating in education. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 24, emphasizes the right to inclusive education and prohibits disability-based discrimination in education. Achieving quality disability-inclusive education depends on: Requiring minimum standards of accessibility for all schools, including in emergency settings; Investing in teacher training that equip all teachers to respond to diversity in the classroom and disability inclusion in particular; Ensuring that learning materials/resources are available in accessible formats and are easily adaptable; Investing in assistive technology and devices for children with disabilities, Ensuring the involvement of Disabled People's Organizations in Education planning and monitoring.

Resources

Disability-inclusive Education in Emergencies: Key concepts, approaches, and principles for practice (INEE, 2023)

Children with disabilities in situations of armed conflict (UNICEF, 2018)

Disability and COVID-19: Guidance note for projects (Girls' Education Challenge UKaid, 2020)

Information and Communication Technology supporting the inclusion of children with disabilities in education (Humanity & Inclusion, 2022)

Quality Inclusive Education at the Heart of the SDGs (IDDC, 2015)

Inclusive Education: towards the inclusion of all learners (Humanity and Inclusion, 2022)

Qualitative Assessment Approaches for the Protection of Children with Disabilities Within Humanitarian Contexts (Alliance, 2023)

Inclusive Education in Emergencies Training Module (INEE, 2024)

GENDER

Gender plays a critical role in how children are treated and how their rights are respected within families and communities. Societies' gender norms influence girls' and boys' different experiences, potential and risks. These 'gendered norms' also affect children with non-binary gender identity or sex characteristics, such as those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender or who are

intersex. Pre-existing gender inequalities tend to increase during a humanitarian crisis. Examples of increased risk during crises may include:

● more child early and forced marriages or being trafficked by armed forces;
● early pregnancy;
● boys may be more vulnerable to forced recruitment;
● transgender children may be at a greater risk of violence or difficulties accessing learning spaces;
● all genders may be expected to assume more caregiving or seek employment to support the family, etc.

The impact on a child's ability to enter, continue, or complete formal and non-formal education may be significant. Analyses of children's risks and resilience related to gender should be conducted throughout the programme cycle. Interventions should be sensitive to the root causes of gender discrimination and inequality, avoid reinforcing or continuing gendered power relations, and support gender equality whenever possible.

Resources

INEE Guidance Note on Gender (INEE, 2019)

Navigating Resistance to Gender Transformation Education in Emergencies: 10 Tips for Practitioners (INEE, 2025)

Policies and interventions to remove gender-related barriers to girls' school participation and learning in low- and middle-income countries: A systematic review of the evidence (Campbell Systematic Reviews, 2022)

IASC Gender Equality Measures Tip Sheet (IASC, 2018)

Gender Resource Collection (INEE)

Transforming Patriarchy: Engaging Men and Boys in Promoting Gender Equity in and through Education (INEE, 2025)

The Declaration of Gender Justice in Islam, Research and Findings (Islamic Relief Worldwide, 2019)

Gender responsive Teachers training Pack (Plan International, 2020)

The Role of Cash and Voucher Assistance in Increasing Equity and Inclusion for Girls and Children with Disabilities in Education in Emergencies (Global Education Cluster CVA Task Team)

INEE Gender Training Manual (INEE, 2019)

CHILDREN ON THE MOVE: Refugee, IDP, Stateless, Migrant Children

Children who are refugees, internally displaced, or stateless face increased risks of abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence. All children have the same rights under the Convention of the Rights of the Child. States have obligations to protect them and ensure their rights are protected. Legal, policy, practical barriers and discrimination may result in children being denied access to essential services. All responses

must seek sustainable solutions for children, their families, and their communities through programmatic interventions and support to relevant policies and capacity strengthening efforts of authorities. Inclusion in equitable quality education in national education systems contributes to resilience, prepares children and youth for participation in cohesive societies and is the best policy option for refugee, displaced and stateless children and youth and their hosting communities.

Specific bodies of laws and policies address the rights of refugees, including the 1951 Refugee Convention (and its 1967 Protocol) and the Global Compact on Refugees which provide specific protections and emphasize specific rights of refugees. This includes the right to formal education. Non-formal education is not referenced although it is often part of a more comprehensive EiE response for refugees. When refugees return to their country of origin, they are referred to as 'returnees' and require specific support to reintegrate, including reintegration into education systems. Working in refugee crises therefore involves specific legal frameworks, considerations and procedures which have implications for practitioners in areas such as coordination, working with governments, data collection and information management, processes for registration, refugee status determination and sustainable solutions. For these, specific UNHCR guidance applies.

All children are the responsibility of the government of the country within which they reside. Protections and services should be provided as per national policy and standards. For many refugees and displaced, the lack of proper documentation may be an issue. This may create barriers to access services and secure/benefit from legal systems, including the ability to enroll in and attend formal education in host countries and communities.
The potential lack of documentation and recognition of rights creates significant barriers to children enrolling, completing, and being recognized for academic achievements. In some contexts, refugee/displaced/migrant/stateless children are not included in sub-national or national data, including education data systems. This impacts funding allocations, training and resource allocation, and tracking progress in and challenges in learning. Additionally, host country and community language and curriculum (history, culture) may not meet the needs of children on the move.

Consider: In addition to the i interventions supporting children on the move, consider the transferability, accreditation, and value of academic training and prospects for employment when or if they settle, resettle, or return to their home country.

Resources

[Equitable Access to Quality Education for Internally Displaced Children](#) (UNICEF/IDMC, 2019)
[Education, Children on the move and Inclusion in Education](#) (UNICEF, 2022)
[Refugee Education 2030, a Strategy for Refugee Inclusion](#)
[Guide to Refugee Inclusion in National Education Systems](#), World Bank and UNHCR, 2025
[Global Compact on Refugees](#) (UNHCR, 2019)

[Supporting Integration: A Toolkit for Practitioners Working with Children and Young People on the Move](#) (Family For Every Child, 2025)

[Education solutions for migrant and displaced children and their host communities](#) (UNICEF, 2022)

[UNHCR Best Interest Procedure Guidelines: Assessing and Determining the Best Interest of the Child](#) (UNHCR, 2021)

UNACCOMPANIED AND SEPARATED CHILDREN (UASC)

In most armed conflicts, mass population displacements, natural disasters, famines/food crises and other crises, children are at an increased risk of separation from their families or from other adult caregivers. UASC are one of the most vulnerable groups in crisis contexts, often deprived of care and protection. While some may need temporary alternative care, most can be reunited with parents/caregivers, siblings, members of the extended family or other adults whom they know and who are willing and able to provide care and protection.

UASC are supported under protection frameworks that respect principles of family unity and the best interests of the child. Components of programming may include the prevention of separation, family tracing and reunification, interim care, long-term solutions for those who cannot be reunified, and supportive interventions that promote well-being and healthy development. This may look like:

- Substantial case management system to ensure children's best interests are assessed, determined and taken as a primary consideration in all decisions that affect them.
- UASC are prioritized for equal, safe access to assistance, protection and services, including education. Address financial and logistical barriers for both UASC and their caregivers.
- Timely, systematic, multisectoral monitoring and follow-up (a) supports family reunification and community reintegration and (b) verifies that children who have been reunited are receiving adequate care.
- Supporting the training of all caregivers who support UASC, including teachers, to ensure children's confidence, trust and sense of security is strengthened and specific needs met in care and at school. Caregivers are provided ongoing support.
- Where there is the need for specialized intervention, local resources should be explored and supported as long as they are in the best interests of the child.
- Where reunification is not possible, support community-based care which promotes a child's culture and provides continuity in learning, socialization, and development.
- A child's enrolment and progress in learning is officially documented and transferred when a child is reunified.

Interventions should both focus on responding to the needs of UASC as well as preventing the risk and mitigating the impacts of separation. School and community-based disaster preparedness activities can prevent and/or mitigate the risk of separation as well as create contingencies that allow for rapid reunification with families and communities. Child safeguarding and reporting systems should be responsive to the potential for separation.

Resources

Child Protection Minimum Standards (Alliance, 2020), Standard 13

Inter-Agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children (Inter-agency, 2004)

Field Handbook on UASC (IAWG-UASC, 2016): Core operational guidance across prevention, FTR, interim/alternative care, and durable solutions, with relevance to education continuity.

Alternative Care in Emergencies (ACE) Toolkit (IAWG, 2013): Practical toolkit for designing/monitoring alternative care, highlighting the role of schools in protective care.

Toolkit on UASC (Alliance, 2017)

Guidelines on supervised independent living for unaccompanied children (UNHCR, 2021)

Guidance Note: Primary Prevention of Family Separation (Alliance, 2022)

Learning Package: Prevention of Separation (Alliance, 2023)

Child Protection Case Management Training Package for Case Workers in Humanitarian Settings - Level 3 Unaccompanied and Separated Children (Alliance, 2023)

UASC Training of Trainers (Alliance, 2023)

HARMFUL CULTURAL PRACTICES

Harmful cultural practices, such as child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM), are discriminatory practices committed regularly over long periods of time that communities and societies consider acceptable. Around the world, hundreds of millions of children experience some form of violence, exploitation or harmful practice, although girls are at much greater risk. The cultural norm may extend out of gender, ethnic, religious, social group or caste identities. Examples of harmful practices include:
- Child marriage and FGM reflecting community values that hold girls in low esteem.
- Involvement in livelihoods and supporting families through pastoral responsibilities preventing boys from attending school after a certain age.
- Menstruation taboos and practices which prevent interaction, place girls in additional danger or isolation, and prevent consistent attendance in education.

Consider: How might integrated programs correct inequitable policies and cultural perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors that enable harmful practices?

Resources

CPMS Video Series: Standard 8, Physical violence and other harmful practices (Alliance, 2016)

Guidance for Engaging Traditional Leaders: Child Marriage (Save the Children, 2020)

[Secondary Education and Early Marriage in Forced Displacement and Crisis Settings Briefing Paper](#) (Plan International/UNHCR, Secondary Education Working Group, 2024)

[Preventing and Responding to Child Early Forced Marriage and Unions Technical Guidance](#) (Save the Children, 2021)

[Theory of Change: Prevent and Respond to Child Marriage in Humanitarian and Forced Displacement settings](#) (Plant Internation and Save the Children International, 2025)

CHILDREN IN CONTACT WITH THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

Children may interact with the justice system as witnesses, victims (survivors), accused, convicted offenders, or a combination of these. In crisis contexts, it is not unusual for communities to be exposed to higher levels of law enforcement officers and other authorities tasked with responding to or preventing civil unrest. There are some groups of children who may have more frequent exposure or may be more vulnerable within legal and civil systems. For example, displaced and migrant children may be detained at border crossings, children formerly associated with armed forces/groups (CAAFAG) may be detained, working children who may lack permits or not yet at a legal age of work, children who have been deprived of their rights by unjust legal systems and practices. Building on the strengths of each sector, integrated programs may provide immediate protective measures while redressing and addressing learning needs to support reintegration, acceptance, and positive behaviors as needed.

Resources

[Child Protection Minimum Standards](#) (Alliance, 2020), Standard 20

[Inter-agency Review of Justice for Children in a Humanitarian Context (CPMS 14)](#) (International Bureau for Children's Rights, Alliance, 2016)

[The United Nations Global Study of Children Deprived of Liberty](#) (Nowak 2019)

CHILD LABOR

Child labor is work undertaken by children under the legal minimum working ages. National legislation normally sets various minimum ages for different types of work. For example, the age for normal full-time work may begin at the age at which compulsory schooling ends. The term child labor refers to work that is mentally, physically, socially, or morally dangerous and harmful to children, and which interferes with their schooling by depriving them of the opportunity to attend school, making them to leave school prematurely, or requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work.

Child labor is any work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity. Child labor is work that interferes with children's education and negatively affects their emotional, developmental, and physical well-being. Many child laborers are engaged in the worst forms of child

labour (WFCL), including forced labor, recruitment into armed groups, trafficking for exploitation, sexual exploitation, illicit work or hazardous work. Humanitarian crises may increase the prevalence and severity of existing forms of child labor or trigger new forms. (See also CPMS Standards 9 and 11.)

All children are protected from child labor, especially the worst forms of child labor, which may relate to or be made worse by the humanitarian crisis. Agencies should support children to leave harmful child labor, support their reintegration into families (where needed), and re-enter education, as appropriate. In instances where this is not possible it is important to:
- Aim for harm reduction by decreasing the working hours,
- Support the transition out of the worst forms of child labor,
- Collaborate with families, communities, employers, and systems to ensure protection risks are mitigated to the extent possible,
- Ensure alternative, flexible, and protective learning opportunities exist and are accessible to child laborers.

Resources
Child Protection Minimum Standards (Alliance, 2020), Standard 12

Child Labour and Education in Humanitarian Settings (Alliance, INEE, 2023)

Preventing and Responding to Child Labour in Humanitarian Action (Alliance, 2021)

Child Labour Case Study | Promoting Education to Prevent Child Labour Among Adolescent Girls in Lebanon

Child Labour Case Study | Conditional Cash Programming to Address Child Labour and Promote Education in Turkey

CHILDREN ASSOCIATED WITH ARMED FORCES/GROUPS

"Armed conflict has a devastating impact on children, subjecting them to violence, forced displacement, separation from family, extreme disruptions in basic services, and a loss of learning and employment opportunities. It also imposes suffering through serious violations of children's rights, such as sexual exploitation, rape and other grave sexual violence, killing and maiming, and recruitment into armed forces and groups. Recruitment or use of children in armed forces and armed groups refers to compulsory, forced or voluntary conscription or enlistment of children into any kind of armed force or armed group. It is one of the six grave violations against children in times of war, yet the number of recruited children continues to rise.

Children associated with armed forces and armed groups (CAAFAG) are of different ages, genders and ethnicities. Boys and girls are used by armed forces and armed groups in a number of different ways, including as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, and spies. They are often also subjected to sexual exploitation. Some become involved through intimidation, abduction, or forced marriage. Others might see enlistment as a survival strategy when faced with poverty, lack of access to education and employment, domestic violence or oppressive gender norms. While the experience of girls associated with armed forces

and armed groups is largely overlooked, they are no less affected than boys when it comes to directly participating in or witnessing armed conflict.

Association with armed forces and armed groups exposes children to physical, psychological and sexual violence, and profoundly disrupts their development and later lives. On leaving armed forces and armed groups, children and their families often experience high levels of stress, including socioeconomic adversity, stigma and discrimination. Lost educational opportunities and difficulties in achieving key life milestones make many children feel ill-equipped to contribute to their family and local economy when they return to civilian life. Some formerly recruited and used children are detained for extended periods, tried as participating in hostilities considered illegal, and exposed to torture and uncertainty. Being separated from their families and losing loved ones also threatens their wellbeing and healthy development." (Alliance, 2022b)

Resources
Child Protection Minimum Standards (Alliance, 2020), Standard 11

Education Interventions for Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups (Alliance, 2023)

Education for children and young people formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups. Guidance for teachers and educators. (SRSG CAAC, 2025)

Cradled by Conflict: Implications for Programming (United Nations University, 2018)

Technical Note on Girls Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Group (Alliance, 2020)

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in CAAFAG Programmes (UNICEF, 2022)

Guiding Principles for the Domestic Implementation of a Comprehensive System of Protection for Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (ICRC, 2011)

Childhood in Rubble: The Humanitarian Consequences of Urban Warfare for Children (ICRC, 2023) this document includes other vulnerabilities as well