



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

# Guidance Note: Primary Prevention of Family Separation

*Addendum to the Field Handbook on Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC) and accompanying Toolkit*



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The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (the Alliance) supports the efforts of humanitarian actors to achieve high-quality and effective child protection interventions in humanitarian settings. Through its technical Working Groups and Task Forces, the Alliance develops inter-agency operational standards and provides technical guidance to support protection of children in humanitarian settings.

For more information on the Alliance's work and joining the network, please visit [www.alliancecpha.org](http://www.alliancecpha.org) or contact us directly: [info@alliancecpha.org](mailto:info@alliancecpha.org).

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## GUIDANCE NOTE: PRIMARY PREVENTION OF FAMILY SEPARATION<sup>1</sup>

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### Addendum to the Field Handbook on Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC) and accompanying Toolkit<sup>2</sup>

*Remember this:*

- Primary prevention addresses the root causes among the population or community to reduce the likelihood/incidence of separation and decrease the need for secondary and tertiary prevention and response services;
- A primary prevention approach is based on a comprehensive analysis of the risk and protective factors across the socio-ecological context (individual, family and relationships, community, society and regional/international levels), that impact whether children experience family separation in the given context;
- Actions to address risk and protective factors in multi-sectoral preparedness plans should involve developing multi-sector assessment tools and working with key sectors to ensure that vulnerability to separation is considered and root causes of separation are addressed through these sectors' actions;
- Primary prevention interventions should be incorporated into UASC programmes at each step of the programme cycle, along with secondary and tertiary prevention and response as needed;
- Changes in risk and protective factors should be identified through monitoring so that prevention interventions can be adapted as needed.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the Primary Prevention Framework: The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (2021). Primary Prevention Framework for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action

<sup>2</sup> Inter-agency Working Group on Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC) [Field Handbook on Unaccompanied and Separated Children](#), Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2016; Inter-agency Working Group on UASC, [Toolkit on Unaccompanied and Separated Children](#), Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2017. In addition, the Alternative Care in Emergencies Toolkit, published by Save the Children on behalf of the Interagency Working Group on Unaccompanied and Separated Children (2013), is a key resource for information on prevention of separation (Chapter 2)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

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In 2021, the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action published the *Primary Prevention Framework for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action* (the Framework). This was developed due to the recognition that whilst there has been significant progress regarding response to harm against children, less emphasis has been placed on *preventing* abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation of children. The aim of the Framework is to provide guidance for humanitarian workers on the key actions and considerations to apply when developing or implementing programming to prevent harm to children in humanitarian settings “*at the population-level*”.

### **What is primary prevention and what does “at the population level” mean?**

Primary prevention is about identifying and addressing trends or patterns of harm to children within the population as well as their root causes. This complements a responsive approach that focuses on identifying individual cases of children who have been harmed for service provision and referral. Primary prevention aims to reduce the risk of harm for all children within a population or a sub-group of the population. A population can refer to a whole society or a part of it; for example, a specific geographic community. It can also refer to a sub-group of children within the broader society; for example, all children living in refugee camps within a country, or all children aged one to five years old in the broader society.

*Adapted from The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (2021). Primary Prevention Framework for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action p.8*

Similarly, guidance on primary prevention of family separation is lacking. Whilst the Field Handbook and Toolkit on UASC include some information on population level approaches, particularly through ‘child protection systems strengthening’, there has been significant progress on defining and developing guidance on primary prevention in humanitarian settings since their publication.<sup>4 5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The majority of information on prevention of family separation including through ‘child protection systems strengthening’ can be found in chapters 3 & 5 of the Inter-agency Working Group on UASC, Field Handbook on Unaccompanied and Separated Children, Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2016

<sup>4</sup> See also Interagency Working Group on Unaccompanied and Separated Children, Alternative Care in Emergencies Toolkit (2013), published by Save the Children on behalf of the Inter-agency Working Group on Unaccompanied and Separated Children. Chapter 2 provides extensive information on prevention of separation including identifying vulnerable families and providing targeted interventions.

The purpose of the Guidance Note is to fill this gap by linking the purpose, concept and principles of primary prevention to prevention of family separation. Key elements for primary prevention of family separation in the programme cycle will be described with examples and references to existing relevant contents of the Field Handbook and Toolkit on UASC.

## 2. APPLYING THE PRIMARY PREVENTION FRAMEWORK TO PREVENTION OF FAMILY SEPARATION IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

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Applying a primary prevention approach to prevention of family separation involves addressing the root causes of family separation within a population or community, leading to an overall reduction in the number of children separated from their families.

Root causes of family separation will depend on the context but examples include socio-economic marginalisation/deprivation, harmful social norms and traditions, family breakdown, violence in the home, psychosocial distress of caregivers and/or children, lack of education or vocational opportunities and/or lack of family support services, which can lead to situations in which children separate from their families e.g. through child marriage, child recruitment, children being sent away for their safety, for work or educational opportunities (including across international borders), abandonment, trafficking, etc. Conflict, violence and insecurity in communities are also root causes which can lead to family separation due to ‘accidental’ separation during flight or ‘deliberate’ separation when parents/carers send their children away to a place of safety.<sup>5</sup> Drought and food insecurity are likely to lead to greater numbers of both ‘accidental’ and ‘deliberate’ family separation linked to the climate crisis.

Understanding the root causes and risk factors relating to family separation and protective factors (at individual, family, community and societal levels) that can be addressed to prevent separation within a context is the foundation of primary prevention efforts.

Examples of population level programmes/primary prevention approaches to prevent family separation include support to caregivers such as cash-based interventions or livelihood support, the provision of

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<sup>5</sup> Inter-agency Working Group on UASC, Field Handbook on Unaccompanied and Separated Children, Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2016 2.1.1 Causes of separation in emergencies pp 53,54

vocational training, life skills training, psychosocial support and promoting access for all children to birth registration and safe education.

### **The three levels of prevention in relation to family separation**

Three levels of prevention are described in the Framework – primary, secondary and tertiary, however– the main focus of this guidance note is on primary prevention because considerations for secondary and tertiary prevention are already well covered within the existing guidance.

<b>Prevention Level</b>	<b>Target Group</b>
Primary prevention – addresses the root causes among the population to reduce the likelihood/incidence of family separation	All children in a community or population or all children of a sub-group, e.g., refugee/ internally displaced populations, girls or boys of a certain age.
Secondary prevention – addresses the specific threat and/or vulnerabilities of children identified as being at risk of family separation	All children identified as being at high risk of family separation.
Tertiary prevention – aims to mitigate the longer-term impact of family separation, including preventing re-occurrence of separation and other forms of harm.	Children already separated from their parent/s / primary caregiver(s)

Insufficient investment has been made in primary prevention programming to prevent family separation across populations; the major focus of child protection actors in humanitarian programming has generally been on secondary and tertiary prevention interventions. An investment in primary prevention will reduce the number of families and children in need of secondary and tertiary prevention services as well as response services such as family tracing and reunification. With the inclusion of mechanisms to identify 'at risk' children (and refer separated children who are identified) within primary prevention efforts, the risks of separation and its longer-term impacts will be further reduced. Primary prevention is now acknowledged as being essential to enhancing the protection and well-being of children, as well as ensuring accountability to children and the centrality of protection within humanitarian preparedness and response efforts.

### 3. APPLYING THE CPHA PREVENTION PRINCIPLES TO INTERVENTIONS TO PREVENT FAMILY SEPARATION

The Primary Prevention Framework includes eight principles for effective primary prevention interventions based on existing evidence.<sup>6</sup> These principles are all relevant to prevention of harm to children, including family separation, and should be applied throughout all stages of child protection programming, from preparedness through to evaluation and learning.<sup>7</sup> In the following section, each principle is described as it relates to the prevention of family separation.



<sup>6</sup> The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (2021). Primary Prevention Framework for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action pp 9, 10, 11

<sup>7</sup> Prevention programmes generally also include a response component and it should be noted that most of the eight principles are not only applicable to effective prevention but also to response.



## **Be context specific**

Actions to prepare for and prevent family separations (and provide an appropriate response) must be based on the scope, types and patterns of family separation and identification of root causes which can be different in each situation. Each context will have a unique combination of risk and protective factors which should be identified in consultation with children, families, communities and other stakeholders. This involves understanding the cultural context, legal and policy framework, social norms and in particular, concepts related to family and care practices for all children, especially the most vulnerable including those without parental care. For example, the risk of separation may relate to conflict due to famine but a strong tradition of extended family care will be an important protective factor.<sup>8</sup>

## **Address multiple levels of the socio-ecology:**

The causes/factors leading to family separation often exist at different levels of the socio ecological model (individual, family and relationships, community, society and regional/international levels) and prevention interventions must identify and address these at the relevant level/s. Some causes/factors may span more than one level; such as children sent away by their family to work, due to lack of livelihood opportunities and/ or safety nets in their community or locality. In this example, awareness raising on the risks and consequences of family separation when sending children away from home to work will be needed at the family and community levels alongside interventions at national level to support economic and livelihood opportunities, ensuring these are inclusive for all members of society.

## **Use a holistic multi sectoral approach**

The work of other sectors responding to a humanitarian emergency, as well as integrated multi-sectoral approaches, can be important in preventing family separations and complementing child protection interventions. For example, cash-based interventions and family support can strengthen families to continue caring for their children, while the provision of adequate shelter, psychosocial support and/or education opportunities can also help to prevent and mitigate risks of family separation in humanitarian settings. Interventions across sectors to prevent family separation can be implemented at all levels of prevention at the same time.

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<sup>8</sup> Inter-agency Working Group on UASC, Field Handbook on Unaccompanied and Separated Children, Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2016, Chapter 3.1.3

On the other hand, if other sectors do not adequately take into account the protection of children, family separation can inadvertently be created. For example, livelihood support which specifically targets UASC rather than a range of children with different vulnerabilities / risk factors, can encourage caregivers to relinquish the care of their children, in order to benefit from this support. Therefore, awareness raising, training and integrated/joint approaches across sectors on sector-specific ways to protect and preserve family unity and prevent separation are very important.<sup>9</sup>

## **Measure outcomes**

Prevention of harm can be difficult to measure directly as it is the absence of something occurring, but measurement of outcomes, demonstrating a reduction in risk and an increase in protective factors, can provide a good indication of the effectiveness of prevention interventions. For example, where the risk of separation relates to increased stress and food insecurity in a population and the intervention aims to enhance national level social protection programmes, the result outcome would be that parents/carers report an increased sense of confidence in their ability to provide for their children or that there are decreased numbers of family separations. Collection of disaggregated data is essential to effective measurement of outcomes (see below).

## **Use a strengths-based approach**

Prevention is not just about reducing risk but also involves increasing protective factors where these are identified during assessments and/or monitoring. For example, if access to safe secondary education is seen as a protective factor in preventing family separation, then population wide efforts to rollout safe schools' initiatives will be a key approach. Access to family care services, including parental skills sessions and psychosocial support for caregivers, as well as the availability of community based psychosocial support for children and adolescents, should lead to a reduction in stress within families in humanitarian settings and prevent family breakdown and separation. At a community level, children, families, communities and societies have their own capacities and are likely to be taking steps to prevent separation and support their vulnerable members – these should be analysed and built on.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Inter-agency Working Group on UASC, Field Handbook on Unaccompanied and Separated Children, Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2016, Chapter 3.1.4 & pp. 279 – 283, Inter-agency Working Group on UASC, Toolkit on Unaccompanied and Separated Children, Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2017, Tool 9

<sup>10</sup> Inter-agency Working Group on UASC, Field Handbook on Unaccompanied and Separated Children, Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2016, Chapter 5.1.2 p.102

## **Facilitate community ownership**

Linked to the strengths-based approach and identification of risk and protective factors is the principle of prioritising and supporting community led approaches to prevent separations. Local and national community actors are likely to have a deeper understanding of root causes of separation and local prevention approaches and it is essential to work alongside and where appropriate support and build on local capacity. For example, local leaders, women's groups or members of child protection focused community groups, as well as children themselves can be involved in an analysis of protective and risk factors and can also implement community measures, raising awareness and sharing ideas on preventing separation with other children and caregivers.<sup>11</sup>

## **Be child centred and inclusive**

Using a child centred approach is about ensuring that children are at the core of the analysis and interventions. This does not necessarily involve their participation but means that whether interventions target children, families or communities – or national or international government, children's needs and interests are prioritised.

Disaggregated data is essential in understanding the key factors related to age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability groups or other vulnerability factors which may make children more vulnerable to separation. For example, there may be a disproportionate number of children with disabilities amongst separated children and this will inform prevention interventions which need to be inclusive if they are to reduce harm for all children. Informing children (in an age-appropriate way) and involving them in analyses of protective and risk factors as well as supporting their direct participation in prevention activities such as developing child friendly messages, has been shown to be effective in preventing family separations.<sup>12</sup> Engaging with children who are already separated, for example living on the streets or migrating for child labour, is a way of understanding the root causes of separation e.g. violence or risk of

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<sup>11</sup> Inter-agency Working Group on UASC, Field Handbook on Unaccompanied and Separated Children, Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2016, Chapter 3.1.1 & 3.1.2pp.67,68, Inter-agency Working Group on UASC, Toolkit on Unaccompanied and Separated Children, Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2017, Tool 4

<sup>12</sup> See also Inter-agency Working Group on UASC, Field Handbook on Unaccompanied and Separated Children, Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2016, Liberia – Adolescents working to prevent separation – case study p.103 The participation of children in prevention and response to separation is also a guiding principle of the UASC Handbook and Toolkit.

child marriage which would help ensure the inclusion of populations at high risk of separation in prevention programmes.

## **Bridge development and humanitarian systems**

Prevention and response to family separation require a sustainable long term strategy including measures to prevent separation within existing child protection systems, (and ways to adapt during times of crisis). Existing national systems for child protection/child welfare such as adequate legislation (and its implementation) relating to child protection as well as effective inter-sectoral family support services can help to create safer environments and better support the protection and well-being of children. Data protection and information management systems, such as the CPIMS+,<sup>13</sup> have a critical role in capturing information on children at risk of separation, those already separated and children in alternative care. Interventions related to behaviour change and addressing harmful social norms which can lead to family separation – such as child marriage, are more likely to be possible through long term approaches. Emergency preparedness and planning in at risk contexts is an important way to lay the foundations for bridging development and humanitarian systems.

## **4. KEY ELEMENTS FOR PRIMARY PREVENTION OF FAMILY SEPARATION IN THE PROGRAMME CYCLE**

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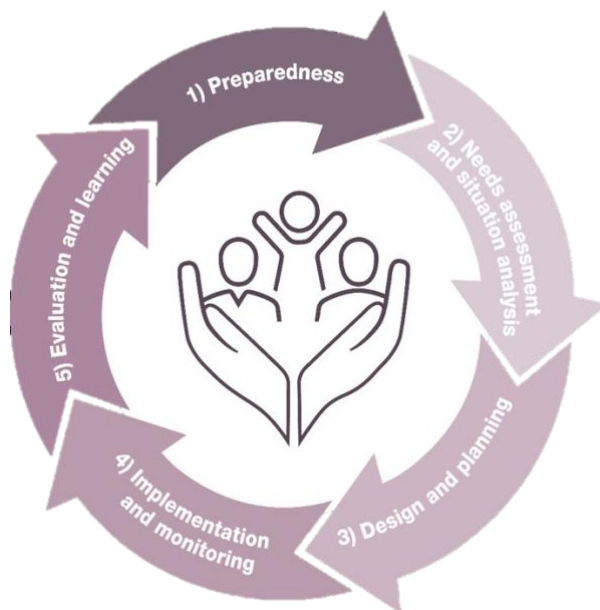
The programme cycle consists of five core steps: (1) preparedness; (2) needs assessment and situation analysis; (3) design and planning; (4) implementation and monitoring; and (5) evaluation and learning.<sup>14</sup> This framework guides programming to enhance the quality and accountability of humanitarian interventions. Programmes to prevent and respond to family separation, will operate within this framework.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.cpims.org/>

<sup>14</sup> The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2019 Edition, Standard 4 Programme Management Cycle p.79

## Five core steps of the programme cycle<sup>15</sup>



The section below outlines elements of primary prevention of family separation in relation to each of the steps of the programme management cycle. These elements and the corresponding actions should be incorporated into programmes to prevent and respond to family separation along with secondary and tertiary prevention and response as needed.

### 4.1 - Step One: Preparedness<sup>16</sup>

#### Which are the key elements to consider in primary prevention of family separation?

Emergency preparedness refers to the activities and measures taken before a crisis to prevent family separation and prepare for an emergency response to unaccompanied and separated children (UASC). Preparedness takes place before a crisis but also continues during a crisis to prepare for changes or an exacerbation of the crisis (e.g., increase in armed conflict).

<sup>15</sup> The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2019 Edition, Standard 4 Programme Management Cycle p.79

<sup>16</sup> See also Inter-agency Working Group on UASC, Field Handbook on Unaccompanied and Separated Children, Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2016, Chapter 3 Mitigating risk of separation: Prevention and preparedness p. 63

*4.1.1 - Understand and document risk and protective factors related to family separation at the population level*

Desk reviews and analyses of the existing national formal and informal child protection/child welfare systems and of common child protection risks and protective factors in a given context, where available, can help in answering the questions below prior to or during a crisis.<sup>17</sup> Reference to the socio-ecological model is helpful in enabling a systematic and thorough analysis of risk and protective factors at each level and taking into account the specific context.

1. Has family separation occurred as a result of previous emergencies (where relevant)?
2. Can patterns or trends relating to family separation be identified and what were the root causes?
3. What are the root causes of family separation/situations potentially leading to family separation currently? Examples include lack of economic opportunities leading to adolescents being sent away from home to generate an income and imminent population movement due to conflict.
4. What are the protective factors contributing to the prevention of family separation? Examples include a strong tradition of extended family-based care of children, comprehensive and protective legal and policy framework for children and families and universal access to quality free, safe education.
5. Considering the nature and scale of the emergency, are there specific populations/sub-populations that may be more susceptible to family separation?
6. How many children are in existing alternative care, what kinds of care arrangements are in place (e.g., institutions, foster care, extended family care etc.) and what is the quality of the different types of care arrangement?
7. Which services and supports are already in place? Examples include a well-functioning social welfare system with trained social workers, an existing case management system and the inclusion of actors from community, local, national and international levels.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See also: Inter-agency Working Group on UASC, Field Handbook on Unaccompanied and Separated Children, Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2016, Chapter 2 Characterizing family separation in emergencies p.51 & Chapter 5 Assessment of separation and risk of separation, p.97

<sup>18</sup> Implementation of the CPIMS + or equivalent is recommended where there is no case management system in place or where there is a need for a more appropriate/effective system.

#### *4.1.2 - Include local and community actors in the development of preparedness plans*

Preparedness plans should be developed with local and community actors and include information on who will implement actions to prevent separation, how they will be resourced and how existing prevention services and supports could be adapted in the crisis scenario.

#### *4.1.3 - Include actions to address risk and protective factors in multi-sectoral preparedness plans*

Where possible preparedness plans should also include actions to prevent harmful outcomes that are likely to occur in a crisis including actions to prevent family separation. Child Protection actors should work with sectors to ensure that vulnerability to separation is considered and prevention measures are included. For example, the health sector should take into account the potential need for alternative care when planning provision of inpatient treatment during infectious disease outbreaks; education actors should include prevention of separation measures in school evacuation procedures.<sup>19</sup>

#### *4.1.4 Advocate for and invest in primary prevention action pre-crisis*

Humanitarian, development and Government actors should work together before a crisis to take actions that will strengthen the capacity of children, families and communities to prevent family separation and mitigate harm to those children already separated. These actions should be based on identified risk and protective factors, for example prioritising funding for national-level social protection measures (e.g., child and family benefits), expanding community and civil society prevention efforts such as the running of parenting support groups or conducting a comprehensive programme to review and update (where necessary) registration of all children in alternative care.

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<sup>19</sup> See Field Handbook on Unaccompanied and Separated Children Matrix p. 267: Cross sector programmes supporting the well-being and needs of UASC)

## 4.1 - Step Two: Assessment and Analyses

### Which are the key elements to consider in primary prevention of family separation?

A primary prevention approach is based on a comprehensive analysis of the risk and protective factors across the socio-ecological levels (individual, family and relationships, community, society and regional/international), that impact whether and in what way children experience family separation in the given context.

Assessment and analyses should build on existing information around family separation and should aim to answer the following critical questions:

*“What are the risk factors leading/potentially leading to family separation?” and*

*“What are the protective factors that can prevent family separation?” and*

*“Are there subgroups/populations where children are more likely to be separated from their caregivers?”*

It may have been possible to develop an understanding of the risk and protective factors during preparedness, but a closer examination of risk and protective factors is important to identify pre-existing and new risks (i.e., those resulting from the crisis) as well as pre-existing protective factors and whether/how these have been affected by the crisis. Furthermore, the impact of the crisis on risk and protective factors may be different for certain sub-groups/populations depending on factors such as the geography or the characteristics of a community. For example, a pre-existing risk of family separation may have been socio-economic marginalisation leading to families sending children away to work; as a result of the crisis a risk of family separation may relate to recruitment of children by armed forces or armed groups. Protective factors could be positively impacted, for example the crisis might further activate a sense of solidarity within communities leading to them being more pro-active, or negatively impacted, for example when previously cohesive communities are affected by interethnic conflict. There may also be new protective factors such as access to life skills or psychosocial support which was not previously available as well as wider protection monitoring.



*4.2.1 Gather existing information from multi-sector sources on protective factors and risks related to family separation/potential for family separation in the context.*

Risk and protective factors relate to a child’s holistic well-being and can be identified and will need to be addressed across sectors. Where possible a joint analysis should be undertaken of risk and protective factors relating to family separation to inform child protection actions, or to enable child protection actors to support other relevant sectors in taking prevention measures.

Where relevant data is not already being collected by other sectors, child protection actors should advocate for the inclusion of data on children’s well-being.

*Examples of multi-sectoral data on family separation and risk and protective factors<sup>20</sup>*

Sector/Actor	Examples of Prevention Related CPHA Data Being Collected by Other Sectors
<b>All Sectors and Actors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information on hard to access populations or marginalised groups</li> <li>• Child well-being services and supports (healthcare, education, nutrition, psychosocial support, etc.) in place by community-level actors</li> </ul>
<b>Food Security /Livelihoods</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information on coping mechanisms (including harmful mechanisms such as sending children to work, child or forced marriage, etc.) at household level</li> <li>• Levels of food insecurity and whether certain groups are affected</li> </ul>
<b>Education</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safety in and around schools and non-formal education sites</li> <li>• Availability of and barriers to accessing education at early childhood, primary and secondary levels</li> <li>• Data on out of school children</li> <li>• Availability of vocational training for adolescents</li> </ul>

<sup>20</sup> Adapted from The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (2021). Primary Prevention Framework for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action.p.19

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Level of awareness and skills of teachers and other relevant staff in schools on how to identify and refer children at risk to provide psychological first aid</li> <li>• Level of active involvement of caregivers/parents in schools</li> </ul>
<b>Health</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existence and scale of disability amongst children</li> <li>• Causes of family separation during epidemics</li> <li>• Level of awareness and skills of health care frontline workers on how to identify and refer children at risk and to provide psychological first aid</li> </ul>
<b>MHPSS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Available mental health and psychosocial support services, including parental support programmes and life skills sessions</li> <li>• Levels and sources of stress for children and caregivers</li> </ul>
<b>GBV</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existence of harmful or protective gender norms</li> <li>• Existence of GBV against children, intimate partner violence and threats and vulnerabilities</li> </ul>
<b>Nutrition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Levels of malnutrition amongst children in the population (this could lead to ‘voluntary’ separation where caregivers perceive children will be better off in residential care for example)</li> <li>• Levels of depression among new mothers</li> </ul>

Building on preparedness activities information should be used to:

- initiate immediate actions to prevent family separation within the child protection and other sectors;
- inform further/new multi sector assessments and cross sector prevention interventions (or advocate for these if not happening).

**Remember:** do not wait to initiate actions to prevent family separation until assessments are completed – use existing information from desk reviews or other sources to initiate actions which can be adapted as more information becomes available.

#### 4.2.2 Conduct further assessment/analysis of the risk and protective factors associated with family separation

Existing information from desk reviews or any previous rapid assessments should inform the focus of future more detailed assessments/situation analyses by child protection actors of the risk and protective factors associated with family separation including issues of family and community resilience and social cohesion.

##### **Risk and protective factor assessment methods**

There are multiple assessment methods such as:

- Participatory assessment exercises with children, families, and community members such as focus group discussions or surveys. A selection of exercises can be found in the [Guidance Notes section of the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action's A Reflective Guide for Community-Level Approaches to Child Protection in Humanitarian Action](#).
- Population monitoring, identifying common factors leading to family separation; or
- Profiling of UASC to identify common risk factors.

*The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (2021). Primary Prevention Framework for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action p. 20*

Investing in participatory processes to identify and rank risk and protective factors at the assessment phase will enable child protection actors to be more targeted in designing programmes to prevent family separation. Furthermore, these exercises may reveal that separation is rooted in more structural issues for example, economic vulnerabilities, social or political unrest, or harmful social norms and this information will support child protection programmes when advocating for multi sector, integrated prevention approaches.<sup>21</sup>(See Step 4 Design and Planning)

#### 4.2.3 Determine if any sub-population groups may be prioritised in prevention efforts

Risk factors potentially leading to separation, such as poverty or harmful social norms, or in the case of conflict or natural disaster, the likelihood of widespread population displacement, affect multiple sub-groups (children of different ages, ethnicity, gender, etc.) In such situations interventions that address all children in a population are needed to reduce overall risk.

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<sup>21</sup> Identifying and Ranking Risk and Protective Factors: A Brief Guide. The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2021 p.5

However, in some instances, it may be more effective to target a specific sub-group of the population who are more vulnerable to family separation. Disaggregation of data during assessment, analysis, monitoring and evaluation will help to identify sub-groups which might be identified by age group, gender, sexual orientation, disability, legal status, geographical region or other status. Children living on the streets, involved in child labour or migration are particularly vulnerable to family separation. It is important to note however that there may be sensitivities relating to certain issues in some contexts, for example sexual orientation or child recruitment and any potential risks to children should be explored and understood before seeking to identify or target children in these groups.

### **4.3 - Step Three: Design and Planning**

#### **Which are the key elements to consider in primary prevention of family separation?**

Programme design and planning builds directly on the assessment and analysis and underpins the evaluation of change and evidence that will be generated from the programme.

##### *4.3.1 Identify result level outcomes and indicators that measure changes in risk and protective factors and prioritise interventions.*

Outcomes and indicators should show a demonstrable link between the way in which changes in risk and protective factors can lead to a reduction in the incidence or potential for family separation.

##### *Examples of result outcomes*

<b>Risk Factor</b>	<b>Programme Intervention</b>	<b>Result Outcomes</b>
Family breakdown due to increased stress and food insecurity in displaced population.	Social protection programme encompassing livelihoods, economic and parenting support.	Parents/carers report an increased sense of confidence in their ability to provide for their children.
Accidental separation during population movement related to conflict.	Culturally appropriate messages and information to families/communities.	Parents/carers know about prevention measures and report increased confidence in keeping their children safe.

As all the issues cannot be addressed it is important to be strategic in selecting the risk and protective factors which will have the most impact on preventing family separation and are the most feasible to address, where possible with the involvement of affected communities. (See 4.2.4)

#### *4.3.2 Design population-level approaches to address risk and protective factors at multiple levels of the child's social ecology.*

Prevention interventions will often need to address risk and protective factors at multiple levels of the social ecology and may require actions by more than one sector. For example, family strengthening may involve the provision of parenting support sessions by child protection or social services complemented by a national programme of economic support such as child and family benefits.

Where interventions by other sectors are identified as the most likely to be effective at population level, the contribution of child protection actors may be around advocacy and support to the relevant sector/s, for example, involving data collection and analysis and ensuring marginalized or hard to reach children and families are included. In order for such advocacy on inclusion to be practical, child protection actors will need a thorough understanding of the interventions and approaches of other sectors e.g., relating to cash transfers, informal education or access to healthcare.

#### *4.3.4 Design and plan interventions with communities, including children and community, local, national and international actors<sup>22</sup>*

Facilitating community ownership in the design and planning will ensure that interventions are appropriate and sustainable - including the voices of diverse groups of children is essential. Programme design should support strong partnerships whether with communities/civil society organisations or governments and strengthen national child protection systems through financial and technical support.

Flexibility should also be built in to ensure programmes can be adapted according to new information from assessments, changing circumstances or to reflect feedback from communities, including children.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Inter-agency Working Group on UASC, Field Handbook on Unaccompanied and Separated Children, Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2016, Chapter 6 The basics: Programme planning for UASC

<sup>23</sup> See for more information and guidance also: <https://www.who.int/teams/social-determinants-of-health/violence-prevention/inspire-technical-package>

## **4.4 - Step Four: Implementation and Monitoring**

### **Which are the key elements to consider in primary prevention of family separation?**

Humanitarian emergencies are subject to rapid changes in circumstances which can impact on the risk and protective factors identified during initial assessment. Setting up monitoring systems with children, families, community members and other stakeholders can help identify such changes in order to adapt prevention activities accordingly. For example, where a key primary prevention strategy has been to strengthen families through national social protection programmes, an escalation in conflict may make such programmes harder to access and more local, community-based measures may be needed, or, in a rapidly escalating situation, the focus may have to shift towards actions likely to have an immediate impact, such as ensuring that systems to register refugees in receiving countries include information about children and their caregiving environment to prevent/mitigate the impact of future separations and also to prevent trafficking of children.

Prevention interventions may also have to be adapted or changed based on monitoring data. Ongoing monitoring/periodic review is essential to understanding what elements of the programme are working well and what areas need to be adapted or revised. Quantitative information such as how many parents are regularly attending positive parenting programmes and qualitative information, for example shared through focus group discussions with children, should be regularly reviewed and interventions adapted as needed. Reference should be made to the result outcomes identified during programme design.

It may be challenging to demonstrate the impact of different interventions addressing risk factors or strengthening protective factors leading to prevention of family separation. It is important to measure family separation incidence rates before and after the implementation of programmes, to better understand the extent and nature of change. Programmes must measure whether support of behaviour change and family strengthening led to changes in family separation.

## **4.5 - Step Five: Evaluation and Learning**

### **Which are the key elements to consider in primary prevention of family separation?**

Primary prevention of family separation has the potential to reduce the rates of family separation thereby greatly mitigating the long term and sometimes irreversible negative impact and harm to children and families which results from family separation. Even though primary prevention may require significant resources to implement, an overall reduction in the incidence of separation will mean there is less need for labour intensive and often long term secondary and tertiary prevention and responses to UASC. Furthermore, other primary prevention activities are likely to be implemented at the same time and community-based work on gender-based violence, mental health and psychosocial support and violence against children will all contribute to prevention of separation by addressing some of the common root causes.

It may be challenging to demonstrate the impact of interventions designed to prevent family separation through addressing risk factors or strengthening protective factors, i.e. whether these directly led to a reduction in numbers of UASC. However, measurement of the effectiveness of the intervention, for example family strengthening or behaviour change, is possible and should be conducted through programme monitoring and evaluation. Furthermore, measurement of trends of incidence of separation before and after programmes can provide an indication of the effectiveness of interventions more broadly.

Documenting and sharing lessons learned on what works and what does not work is essential to build the evidence base around primary prevention and inform and improve future programmes. Learning may be shared through interagency groups on UASC but should also be disseminated more widely to reach other sectors through coordination groups or other interagency fora. Where prevention interventions have involved other (non-child protection) sectors, joint evaluations should be undertaken where possible.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> See The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (2021). Primary Prevention Framework for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action pp27-29 for further information on conducting evaluations

## 5. CONTEXTUALISATION

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### **The nature, scope and phases of emergencies and Prevention of Family Separation**

Primary prevention approaches are mainly dependent on the identified root causes of separation, which can also be impacted by the nature, scope and phase of the humanitarian emergency such as sudden onset emergencies or protracted humanitarian crises, often demanding different approaches or a combination of approaches. A sudden onset emergency may require immediate measures to be put in place while awaiting results of assessments, whereas in a protracted setting, prevention measures can be designed and implemented based on a more comprehensive analysis of the root causes of family separation. It is also essential that long term prevention strategies are developed which bridge humanitarian and development programmes.

Children are at risk of becoming separated from their families or usual caregivers as a result of any emergency situation. However, the number of unaccompanied and separated children, as well as the geographic scope of the problem, will depend on the type of emergency, capacity of the national child protection system, the overall emergency response, including whether preparedness plans were in place, and other context-specific elements including pre-existing risk and protective factors. These variables have to be understood and taken into account in order to develop effective approaches to prevent family separation in the given context.

Prevention (and response) efforts require different methods and/or short- and longer-term approaches which should be based on the identified root causes of family separations. The unique combination of context-specific risk and protective factors need to be carefully considered and well- understood including the cultural context, social norms and concepts related to family and care and protection of children, including those without parental care, cultural perceptions of family separation and the type and scale of family separation existing prior to the humanitarian crisis.



Programmes to prevent family separation should be developed based on a situation assessment/analysis which covers the following:

- Whether, as a result of a humanitarian crisis, pre-existing trends of family separations have been exacerbated and/or to which extent family separation occurred as a direct result of the crisis.
- How family separations take place: whether family separations are mainly ‘accidental’ or ‘deliberate’.
- The national legislation and formal and informal practices regarding the protection of children, including unaccompanied and separated children and the provision of alternative care;
- The role and capacity of statutory authorities regarding the protection of children, including unaccompanied and separated children and the provision of alternative care;
- The role and capacity of informal actors who may be present and active in the specific context;
- The prevalent protective factors and emergency child protection risks and concerns, including the patterns, scale and drivers of family separation;
- An understanding of community norms regarding child rearing and child care including of children without parental care or guardians;
- The situation of the affected population e.g., are they settled or currently/potentially on the move, access to the population, protracted situation, etc.

Accidental family separations often happen due to sudden or large-scale displacement and insecurity, as well as recruitment, detention or trafficking of children, while ‘deliberate’ or ‘voluntary family separations’ are often deeply rooted in harmful traditional practices and social norms as well as socio-economic vulnerability and/or insecurity. Accidental family separation can also occur after both parents die or are chronically ill. Examples of ‘deliberate’ or ‘voluntary family separations’ are child marriage, families relinquishing the care of children to be placed in institutions due to poverty related issues and/or the perception of the availability of good education and health support, families sending off children for work purposes/child labour and/or as a safety measure. Divorce of parents can also lead to long term family separation, e.g., when children are cared for by extended family members of one of the parents following divorce.

## 6. CONCLUSION

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This guidance note was developed as an Addendum to the Field Handbook on Unaccompanied and Separated Children and accompanying Toolkit with the aim of supplementing previously developed materials on prevention of family separation with additional information on primary prevention. In addition to the Field Handbook and Toolkit on UASC, the Alternative Care in Emergencies Toolkit (ACE), Chapter 2, is an important resource for information on prevention of family separation and should be read in conjunction with the above and this Guidance note.

It is important to remember that primary prevention is not a stand-alone intervention but should be incorporated into programmes to prevent and respond to family separation at each step of the programme cycle, along with secondary and tertiary prevention and response services as needed.