

Humanitarian and climate thematic focus

Children in humanitarian crises face violence at staggering rates. They can't wait. The Global Ministerial Conference in Manila is the moment to commit to protecting them

Why a humanitarian and climate thematic focus

Children living through conflict, displacement, climate shocks, and natural hazard-induced disasters face some of the highest rates and risks of violence, with the least protection around them. In armed conflict, children are being killed, maimed, abducted, recruited and used by armed groups, and subjected to sexual violence at record levels. Yet within humanitarian response itself, child protection is too often deprioritised: treated as secondary to other life-saving needs, underfunded, and among the first things cut when budgets tighten.

At the same time, the global agenda to end violence against children will only succeed if it reaches the children most at risk. Children in humanitarian settings must be at the centre of the agenda, not at its margins. The lived experiences and perspectives of children and young people in fragile and humanitarian contexts, and of those who are displaced or on the move, including because of the climate crisis, must be prioritised and shape decision-making at all levels.

This thematic focus tackles both dynamics, so that the pledges made in Manila reach these children and protection can hold when crisis strikes.

The scale and urgency of the challenge

520 million

children — more than one in five — live in conflict-affected contexts, the highest number ever recorded.

200 million+

children in 133 countries need humanitarian assistance in 2026.

24,174

children suffered grave violations in conflict in 2025 — a record, up 7.5% on 2024. Child killings rose 34%.

1.1 billion

children — nearly half the world's — face at least three overlapping climate hazards.

39%

of refugees and others in need of international protection are children, yet children are 29% of the world's population.

91%

of practitioners say children's access to protection has declined amid funding cuts; 73% report rising violations.

What young people affected by displacement are telling us

Displacement is a major driver of protection risks for children in humanitarian crises. Through the [Migration Youth and Children Platform](#) Global Youth Consultation, young people highlighted risks of trafficking, exploitation, and abuse during unsafe journeys and at borders, as well as family separation, child labour, recruitment through informal networks and digital platforms, and gender-based violence, including early marriage and sexual violence. These risks do not end on arrival: exclusion from school, isolation, discrimination, and pressure to contribute to household income can leave children more exposed to exploitation and violence, including within homes and institutions. Many children do not know where to seek help, face language and documentation barriers, or fear deportation or retaliation if they report violence perpetrated against them. Having services in place is critical, but not enough: children must be able to reach them safely, and support must continue throughout displacement.

In crisis, children suffer first and most

Protecting children is still too often treated as something that can wait. Three things we know should change that, and acting on them is work we need to do together, as a community.

Humanitarian crises multiply violence against children

WHAT WE KNOW

1

Crises break down the protective environment that keeps children safe — families, schools, communities, and the systems around them — exposing them to harms such as recruitment, sexual violence, trafficking, child marriage, and child labour. In armed conflict, children also face grave violations: killing and maiming, recruitment and use, sexual violence, abduction, attacks on schools and hospitals, and denial of humanitarian access.

Policy implication: national action plans and budgets to end violence against children should explicitly include children in humanitarian and climate-affected settings — including refugee and displaced children. In armed conflict, all parties must uphold international humanitarian law, end and prevent grave violations, and support the release and reintegration of children associated with armed forces and groups.

Five times

more likely to die from violence: children in humanitarian crises compared with children elsewhere.

One in five

girls in humanitarian settings is raped or sexually assaulted before the age of 18.

Nine of the ten

countries with the highest rates of child marriage are experiencing humanitarian crises.

Child protection systems can be strengthened even in crisis, when they matter most

WHAT WE KNOW

2

Countries facing crises, for example protracted conflict and recurrent flooding, are already strengthening child protection systems, including case management, the social service workforce, and parenting support. Governments, local organisations, and communities are there before, during, and after any crisis, and must be at the centre of these systems.

Policy implication: build child protection into national preparedness, disaster risk reduction, early warning, anticipatory action, and climate adaptation plans, led by the government with local and community actors.

Prevention is not a luxury. Cutting it moves the cost onto children who have already been harmed, and into more expensive services

WHAT WE KNOW

3

As funding has been cut, practitioners report that prevention services are closing, including parenting support, community-based protection, and safe spaces, and that violations against children are rising. Preventing violence costs far less than providing services to a child already harmed, and spares children lifelong harm.

Policy implication: governments and partners should make prevention a core part of the response from the start. That means working across sectors (child protection, health, education, social protection, livelihoods, justice, and others) to identify and address the root causes of harm to children in a systematic way. Financing should sustain this work: flexible, multi-year funding that bridges humanitarian and development budgets, invests in the social service workforce and reaches local and national actors directly, with children and young people as active stakeholders.

Children affected by crises must be central in Manila pledges

Manila is a pledging conference, and it comes as grave violations against children in conflict reach record levels and protection services across humanitarian contexts are being scaled back: 84% of practitioners in the Alliance's 2026 survey reported funding cuts. Every actor has a role: crisis-affected and host governments through their national pledges; donors, including international financial institutions (IFIs), by investing in the systems and workforces that protect children; and civil society, including local, refugee-led, women-led, and youth-led organisations, by designing, delivering, and partnering for programming and holding everyone to account.

Five headline pledges for Manila

#	What we want to see	How to measure it
REACH AND PROTECT EVERY CHILD · because crises multiply violence		
1	Include and protect every child Refugee, displaced, and stateless children are included in national child protection systems and action plans on equal terms, and children in armed conflict are protected from grave violations.	Governments pledging inclusion in law, policy, and/or national action plans, and endorsing commitments such as the Paris Principles and Commitments and the Safe Schools Declaration.
2	Count every child Refugee, displaced, unaccompanied and separated, and other crisis-affected children are included in national violence surveys and child protection data, disaggregated by displacement status.	Countries whose surveys and data systems include and disaggregate these children.
BUILD SYSTEMS THAT HOLD · because systems can be strengthened in crisis		
3	Build resilient systems before, during and after crises National and local child protection systems are strengthened across laws and policies, coordination, a continuum of services, standards and oversight, data, and the workforce, with children and communities shaping them. They are built into preparedness, disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation plans so they can scale when a crisis hits.	Child protection strategies and action plans that cover crisis preparedness and response; preparedness, disaster risk reduction, early warning, and National Adaptation Plans that include child protection; anticipatory action protocols with child protection actions and pre-arranged financing; and humanitarian and refugee response plans with systems-strengthening objectives.
4	Invest in the social service workforce in crises Governments fund the social service workforce in crisis-affected contexts from their own budgets, with development donors, including IFIs, investing alongside.	Domestic budgets for the workforce, and development and IFI financing in crisis-affected countries. Humanitarian and refugee response plans that have a specific focus on strengthening the social service workforce.
FUND WHAT PREVENTS HARM · because cutting prevention doesn't save money		
5	Fund prevention in every response Prevention — including strategies to address root causes of violence through parenting support, community-based protection and safe spaces — is prioritised and funded in every humanitarian and refugee response plan, with flexible, multi-year financing.	Humanitarian and refugee response plans that include and fund prevention as part of the child protection response

What strong pledges look like

Strong pledges are specific, funded, and time-bound, with a clear indicator and a lead entity. Numbers in brackets refer to the five headline pledges.

Governments

- **[1]** Extend national laws and child protection services to refugee, internally displaced, returnee, and stateless children, including birth registration, case management, and best interests procedures.
- **[1]** Enable school enrolment without documents, recognise prior learning, and address language and cost barriers.
- **[1]** Ratify, endorse, and implement instruments that protect children in armed conflict, such as OPAC, the Paris Principles, and Commitments and the Safe Schools Declaration.
- **[2]** Include crisis-affected and displaced children in national violence surveys and data systems, disaggregated by displacement status.
- **[3]** Integrate child protection into preparedness, disaster risk reduction, early warning and anticipatory action, and National Adaptation Plans, coordinating across sectors such as health, education, social protection, and justice, and plan accessible evacuation and continuity of care for children with illnesses or disabilities.
- **[4]** Allocate domestic budget to the social service workforce, including in crisis-affected areas, with plans for surge capacity when crisis hits.

Donors and IFIs · Humanitarian and development donors, and international financial institutions

- **[1]** Fund reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces and groups, and support for child survivors of violence.
- **[3] [5]** Provide flexible, multi-year funding that bridges humanitarian, development, and climate finance and reaches local actors directly, including youth-led groups, with help navigating grant requirements.
- **[4]** Invest in the social service workforce and national child protection systems in fragile and crisis-affected countries, alongside government budgets.
- **[5]** Fund prevention at scale in every humanitarian and refugee response plan, including addressing root causes of violence through parenting support, community-based protection and safe spaces.

Humanitarian, development and civil society partners · Including UN agencies, NGOs and local organisations

- **[1]** Report grave violations through the UN-led Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism and refer child survivors of violence to services.
- **[1]** Strengthen integrated approaches in which health, education, food security, and other sectors contribute to preventing violence and to broader child protection outcomes (CPMS Pillar 4).
- **[2]** Strengthen national data systems responsibly, and share leadership and resources with local, women-led, and youth-led organisations.
- **[3]** Champion a systems lens in humanitarian response plans, working through national systems from day one.
- **[4]** Train community and youth volunteers in safe referral, with professionals leading case management.

Building on pledges, strategies and standards that already exist

These pledges are not all new; in fact, many have their basis in normative frameworks, standards, and other pledging mechanisms that Ministerial attendees are, or should be, party to, including:

UNCRC and IHL Every child's right to protection, in all settings, including armed conflict and climate crises	SDG 16.2 End abuse, exploitation, and all violence against children	INSPIRE Proven strategies to prevent violence against children	CPMS Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action
Bogotá 2024 Pledges from more than 100 governments	Global Refugee Forum Child Rights pledge: refugee children in national systems	Grand Bargain Funding to local actors as directly as possible	Sendai Framework Disaster risk reduction that protects the most vulnerable

Join us in Manila

If you are going to be at the conference, join us for these two critical sessions — from technical deep dive to ministerial pledges.

SATELLITE SESSION

Tuesday 17 November

13:30–17:00 · Manila Ballroom

Built to Hold — Protecting Children through Humanitarian and Climate Crises

13:30–15:00 · Part 1: Reality Check and Solutions

A keynote, first-hand accounts from young people, new evidence, and one bold solutions panel.

15:00–15:20 · Evidence on Display

A research showcase over refreshments.

15:20–17:00 · Part 2: From Evidence to Action

Five technical action labs turn the evidence into pledges.

Register to attend in person



[Scan the code, or register online](#)

MINISTERIAL PARALLEL SESSION

Thursday 19 November

11:00–12:30

Prevention of Violence and Harmful Practices in Crises

Led by Children and Young People

Two youth moderators guide the conversation; children open the session.

Proof it Works — and a Stress Test

Governments, a donor, and local civil society on building systems that hold through crises.

Voices from the Front Line

Local child protection responders.

From Discussion to Action

A closing round of pledges.

Get in touch

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