



Evidence-to-Advocacy Research Agenda

July 2025

INTRODUCTION

The humanitarian child protection sector is facing a critical inflection point. Years of chronic underfunding have been compounded by a sharp contraction in humanitarian assistance budgets, placing essential prevention and response services at risk—just as children’s protection needs are escalating in scale and complexity. Despite well-established technical standards and decades of professionalisation, the sector is struggling to make the case for continued investment. Donors and senior decision-makers increasingly require credible, outcome-oriented, and economic evidence to justify funding.

At the same time, the humanitarian system is undergoing significant transformation, with structural reforms, an accelerated push toward localisation, and increased pressure to integrate programming across the humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) nexus. These shifts present both risks and opportunities for the child protection sector. Without a clear, evidence-backed investment case, and strong advocacy to senior decision-makers, child protection risks being deprioritised—particularly as the sector confronts narrow definitions of what is considered “life-saving” in crisis contexts.

The Alliance’s May 2025–April 2026 Strategic Brief calls for an urgent and coordinated effort to strengthen the evidence base for more effective funding. This research agenda responds directly to that call. It is intentionally

narrow, time-bound, and advocacy-driven—focused on generating evidence that strengthens the case for child protection as an essential, cost-effective, and central component of humanitarian response.

This agenda is designed to answer a specific question: **“What evidence demonstrates that child protection is essential, cost-effective, and impactful in humanitarian response?”**

The Research Agenda was developed by the Assessment, Measurement, and Evidence Working Group in close collaboration with the Advocacy Working Group and with inputs from across the Alliance’s technical groups. The Research Agenda sets a vision and strategy for the year ahead and is meant to be a living document that responds to emerging needs and capacity.

PURPOSE AND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Purpose

This is not a broad research plan or learning agenda. It is a **targeted, advocacy-driven evidence agenda** designed to close the most urgent evidence gaps that undermine the child protection sector’s ability to:

- Make the investment case for CPHA;
- Demonstrate the consequences of failing to fund CPHA; and
- Show how child protection contributes to the success of the broader humanitarian response.

Specifically, it aims to generate evidence that demonstrates:

- The **cost-effectiveness and return on investment** of CPHA;
- The **added value of CPHA to other sectors**.
- The **essential role of workforce capacity** as a form of humanitarian infrastructure that directly affects program quality, sustainability, and localisation.

Strategic Objectives

1. **Produce advocacy-ready evidence products** that reinforce the case for sustained and increased investment in CPHA.
2. **Demonstrate the impact of child protection** both within the CP sector and as a critical enabler of outcomes in other sectors.
3. **Elevate the centrality of workforce capacity** as a strategic investment essential to delivering quality child protection services and sustaining humanitarian response.
4. **Equip the Alliance, its members, and stakeholders** with credible, usable, and timely tools to influence donors, humanitarian leadership, and policy decision-makers.

This agenda reflects an ambitious but time-bound vision. The research questions are intentionally bold to align with the evidence needs of high-level advocacy and donor engagement. Some can be addressed with existing data, while others will require new investment, collaboration, or multi-year effort. Throughout implementation, the AME Working Group will assess feasibility, identify data gaps, and prioritise efforts accordingly – ensuring that work remains focused, credible, and achievable.

RESEARCH PRIORITIES

1. Making the Investment Case for Child Protection

Purpose

To demonstrate the cost-effectiveness, societal value, and return on investment (ROI) of child protection in humanitarian action (CPHA), and to quantify the economic and social costs of inaction—in other words, what happens when child protection is not funded.

Background and Rationale

Child protection is often the first to be deprioritized during humanitarian budget cuts—despite decades of technical consensus that it is life-saving and life-sustaining. The sector faces a recurring challenge: the lack of economic data to substantiate what practitioners know to be true—that child protection prevents harm, reduces long-term costs to societies, and strengthens recovery and resilience.

Humanitarian leadership and donors increasingly demand costed, outcome-oriented evidence, particularly in a constrained funding landscape that privileges narrowly defined “life-saving” interventions. Without this data, CPHA remains vulnerable to funding cuts, de-prioritisation, and fragmentation.

This research priority responds directly to that demand. It builds on lessons from violence prevention, mental health, and education sectors that have successfully deployed Cost of Inaction (COI) and Return on Investment (ROI) models to secure and sustain funding.

Research Questions

1. What is the economic and social cost of failing to protect children in humanitarian contexts? (e.g., impacts from child marriage, recruitment, child labour, family separation)
2. What does it cost to deliver core CPHA interventions (e.g., case management, CAAFAG reintegration) in humanitarian settings?
3. What return on investment (ROI) can be demonstrated for one flagship CP intervention, based on available outcome data?
4. Which prevention-focused interventions are viable for future ROI studies based on data availability?

Methodologies and Approach

- **Cost of Inaction Model:** Use disability-adjusted life years (DALYs), human capital models, or scenario-based projections to estimate the costs of harms like child marriage, recruitment, or family separation.
- **Costing of Key Interventions:** Compile and synthesize cost data from Alliance members on interventions like case management or CAAFAG reintegration.
- **ROI Modelling (if feasible):** Develop a basic ROI model for one intervention using program costs and available outcome data.
- **Meta-Synthesis:** Leverage global studies (e.g., VAC burden, MHPSS economic studies) to extrapolate proxy values where primary data is lacking.
- **Feasibility Gate (August–September):** Task team will review whether sufficient data exists for ROI analysis within the timeframe. If not, this will defer to a future research cycle.

Scope Focus for 2025–2026

To maintain focus and feasibility, this priority will:

- Centre on a **Cost of Inaction analysis at the sector level**, demonstrating the societal and economic costs of failing to fund CPHA.
- Explore a **light-touch ROI model for a single flagship intervention**, if feasible—likely case management or CAAFAG reintegration.
- Prioritise what can be accomplished with **existing data**, while laying groundwork for more in-depth modelling if resources permit.

2. Demonstrating Child Protection’s Added Value to Other Sectors

Purpose

To demonstrate how child protection contributes to stronger outcomes in other humanitarian sectors—such as education, gender-based violence, nutrition and food security—and to provide concrete evidence that integrated programming delivers more effective, safer, and more sustainable humanitarian responses.

Background and Rationale

Child protection does not operate in isolation. Its role in enabling other sectors is critical but often undervalued or invisible in program design, funding streams, and policy discussions.

Despite growing recognition of the need for integrated programming, systemic barriers persist: siloed funding, unclear mandates, and a lack of shared outcome data. Without strong evidence of how child protection improves cross-sector outcomes, CP risks being seen as a secondary or optional service rather than a core enabler of humanitarian response.

This priority responds to that risk by building the evidence case for **CP as a cross-cutting enabler**, with a specific focus on the education and health sectors—where existing collaboration, data, and policy traction are strongest.

Research Questions

1. How does integrating child protection measures improve the outcomes and effectiveness of other humanitarian interventions? How do the results of CP-inclusive programs compare to programs where child protection-specific risks—such as violence, neglect, family separation, exploitation, or recruitment—are not addressed?
2. What are the risks and negative outcomes when CP is not included in the design and implementation of other humanitarian sectors' interventions?
3. What are strong, real-world examples of integrated programming that demonstrate improved outcomes because child protection was included?

Methodologies and Approach

- **Evidence and Literature Review:** Map existing studies, evaluations, and grey literature that document CP's contribution to other sectors' outcomes.
- **Key Informant Interviews (KIIs):** Conduct targeted interviews with program leads, technical advisors, and field staff from CP and non-CP sectors to identify documented examples and under-reported evidence.
- **Case Study Development:** Develop 2–4 case studies demonstrating how CP integration has improved other sectors' outcomes, ideally with comparative examples (with CP vs. without CP integration).
- **Survey of Alliance Members:** Collect structured feedback from members on where integrated programming has delivered measurable outcomes.
- **Tool Uptake Review:** Rapid scan of how CPMS Pillar 4 (on working across sectors) and related tools and guidance are being understood, applied, and used in other sectoral programming—implemented as a simple in-house survey or through KIIs.

Scope Focus for 2025–2026

- Focus on two humanitarian sectors based on existing available data; this could include education, gender-based violence, food security, and/or nutrition.
- Limit to documenting and analysing **program outcomes**, not processes or barriers (as there is already substantial material on operational barriers).

- Centre on what can be done with **existing data and case studies**, supplemented by targeted new data collection if feasible.

3. Capacity Strengthening and Learning as Strategic Investment

Purpose

To demonstrate that **investments in workforce capacity are not optional—but essential infrastructure** for delivering effective child protection in humanitarian contexts. This priority seeks to show how cuts to workforce capacity degrade program quality, reduce child protection outcomes, and undermine the entire humanitarian response.

Background and Rationale

Child protection is a service-delivery sector. Without a trained, supported, and adequately resourced workforce, CP services cannot function—regardless of how strong the technical guidance or program designs are.

Staffing, supervision, and learning and development (L&D) are often the first budget lines to be cut when funding is reduced, and this current funding crisis is no exception. This undermines all child protection interventions, whether case management, community-based protection, MHPSS or others, and compromises the ability to meet the CP Minimum Standards (CPMS). The impacts are immediate: service quality deteriorates, child protection risks increase, and frontline workers face burnout and attrition.

This research priority aims to elevate workforce capacity as a **core element of humanitarian infrastructure**, rather than an overhead or “nice-to-have.” It also responds to a pressing advocacy need: to show that investing in capacity is a life-saving intervention.

Research Questions

1. How does investment in workforce capacity—training, supervision, technical support—affect program quality and child protection outcomes?
2. What are the consequences for children, services, and staff when workforce investments are reduced or eliminated?
3. What practical/innovative solutions are being employed to meet L&D demands with reduced resources, especially for local NGOs and volunteers?
4. What are the current gaps in capacity among frontline child protection actors, especially local and national actors, and how are they adapting in the face of funding shortfalls? What evidence to donors and organisations need to prioritise and invest in L&D components within projects?

Methodologies and Approach

- **Literature Review:** Scan available research linking capacity strengthening to improved program quality and child-level outcomes in CP or comparable sectors (e.g., health, MHPSS).

- **Pulse-Check Survey:** Rapid survey of Alliance members (with an emphasis on national/local organizations) to document current capacity gaps, stressors, and impacts of staffing cuts.
- **Case Studies:** Develop 2–3 illustrative case studies showing both the positive impact of capacity investments and the risks when supervision or training is lost.
- **Secondary Data Review:** Analyse past L&D efforts within Alliance member organisations to map what was delivered, to whom, and with what outcomes (where data exists).
- **Profiles of Key Roles:** Develop simple role-based profiles (e.g., caseworker, supervisor) that show what happens when these roles are lost or under-resourced—framed for donor and leadership advocacy.

Scope Focus for 2025–2026

- Focus on the link between workforce capacity and **child-level outcomes** (e.g., safety, well-being, continuity of care).
- Centre on **frontline national and local actors**, who are disproportionately impacted by cuts.
- Document both **the consequences of capacity erosion** and **the evidence for positive returns** when L&D and supervision are sustained.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

The research agenda will be implemented in two key stages:

1. **Evidence synthesis and scoping**, led by the **AME Working Group and the Alliance Secretariat**, to produce an initial set of outputs and assess the feasibility of further research.
2. **Task team formation and targeted data collection**, contingent on the outcome of the synthesis and feasibility review.

This phased approach ensures that effort is directed where evidence gaps are both actionable and realistically fillable within the one-year timeframe.

Management and Coordination

- **Stage 1 is fully managed by AME WG and the Secretariat**, requiring no task teams in order to ensure speed, consistency and efficiency.
- Based on what is found in stage 1, **stage 2 works to form and involve task teams** as needed to expand AME/Secretariat capacity. These teams are small, lean, targeted, and time-bound. These will be formed only where new data collection is warranted and feasible (including adequate resourcing). There will be lightweight oversight and monthly check ins, but these task teams are not a permanent working structure.

Targeted Timeline (to be adjusted as needed)

Phase	Timeline	Activities
Feedback & Review	June 2025	Present draft agenda to WG/TF Leads, Secretariat, and Steering Committee for validation.
Evidence Synthesis (First round of outputs)	July–Sept 2025	AME WG + Secretariat lead literature reviews and synthesis of existing data. Draft one Evidence Brief for each priority.
Advocacy Messages	Sept - Oct 2025	AME WG and AWG collaborate to develop advocacy messages based on evidence synthesis.
Feasibility Review and Scoping	September 2025	Based on the synthesis, assess whether sufficient gaps and data availability justify further data collection. Identify which priorities require task teams.
Task Team Formation (If needed)	Oct 2025	Form task teams only for priorities needing new data collection. Define research questions, scope, and roles.
Research Planning	Oct–Dec 2025	Task teams design data collection methods, tools, and partner engagement plans. Secure approvals if needed.
Data Collection and Analysis (If needed)	Jan–Feb 2026	Implement targeted data collection (e.g., surveys, KIIs, case studies). Begin analysis for second briefs.

Dissemination:

- Each **Evidence Brief** will be accompanied by a dissemination toolkit (slide deck, talking points, graphics) targeted to donors, senior leadership, and inter-agency platforms.
- Findings will feed directly into Alliance advocacy efforts, fundraising campaigns, and key global policy moments throughout 2026.