

Prioritising Protection of Children in a Changing Humanitarian Landscape



THE ALLIANCE
FOR CHILD PROTECTION
IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION



May 2025 - December 2026 Strategic Brief

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Strategic Brief: Prioritising Protection of Children in a Changing Humanitarian Landscape

Timeframe: May 2025 – December 2026

Goal: Ensure the continuity of critical child protection prevention and response interventions in humanitarian settings, while adapting to funding shortfalls and changes to the humanitarian architecture.

Unifying Vision: The priorities outlined below, are meant to ensure and advocate for the continued prioritisation of children and their protection within the future of humanitarian action. This entails adaptability of programme implementation approaches to the current reality, while ensuring that children still receive the protection they need and deserve according to humanitarian principles and minimum standards. Therefore, the priorities outlined below should not be seen in isolation, but rather as components of a whole that would deliver on this vision.

This Strategic Brief outlines how the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (the Alliance) will support the sector in mitigating the impact of reduced resources and structural shifts in the humanitarian system. It focusses on sustaining the ability of humanitarian actors to deliver quality child protection programming. Review the previous Alliance 2021-2025 Strategy [here](#).

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Prioritising Protection of Children in a Changing Humanitarian Landscape

GOAL

Ensure the continuity of critical child protection prevention and response interventions in humanitarian settings, while adapting to funding shortfalls and changes to the humanitarian architecture.

Priority 1

Lead and support evidence-informed advocacy efforts that place children and their protection at the centre of humanitarian action

Objective 1: Protection of children is prioritised by key agencies, Alliance members, donors, governments and humanitarian leadership

Objective 2: Existing evidence on the outcomes and impact of child protection services is synthesised to support advocacy efforts

Priority 2

Provide technical leadership for quality programing in line with the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action.

Objective 1: Quality child protection-focussed technical products relevant to the emerging humanitarian landscape are available and meet the needs of diverse practitioners

Objective 2: Practitioners have strengthened CPHA learning and development opportunities

Objective 3: Diverse practitioners inform, contribute to and have access to high-quality technical support that reflects and reinforces the CPMS and responds to country-level technical needs

Priority 3

Alliance members have opportunities to collectively reflect, innovate and act on emerging challenges to the protection of children in humanitarian crises in light of the current funding crisis

Objective 1: Promote meaningful investments in child protection systems, including national and local actors, to enable continuity of high quality CP in the evolving humanitarian landscape

Objective 2: Children and their protection remain central in technical and strategic discussions shaping humanitarian reform and within cross-sectoral ways of working

2. CONTEXT AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

The global humanitarian system is under unprecedented strain, and its capacity to protect children is in acute crisis. Years of chronic underfunding have left programmes to protect children in humanitarian crises especially vulnerable to the cascading effects of recent and forthcoming cuts by major donors—including the United States and key European governments. This is unfolding at a time when the number and severity of humanitarian crises are escalating, with children facing heightened risks of violence, abuse, exploitation, and neglect, including family separation, recruitment and use by armed forces and groups, and harmful practices such as child labour and child marriage. Despite decades of investment in professional standards and system strengthening, the current funding crisis threatens to dismantle core components of child protection systems—including frontline services, skilled personnel, preventive programming, and coordination structures. Without immediate and coordinated action, millions of children will be left unprotected—and, in some cases, at risk of life-threatening harm.

A recent data gathering exercise conducted by the Alliance reveals a deepening crisis across the child protection sector. Of the 250 responding organisations—representing a mix of local, national and international actors—80 per cent reported that the cuts have significantly or very significantly affected children’s protection, with the most serious consequences felt at national and sub-national levels. Nearly 3 out of 4 respondents to the survey said that the funding cuts have had a significant or very significant impact on their organisation’s ability to meet the Child Protection Minimum Standards, placing service quality and potentially child safety at risk. Nearly 80 per cent of local actors have lost frontline staff, reducing their capacity to identify and respond to serious protection concerns, including family separation, sexual violence, and exploitation. At the same time, 63 per cent reported cancelled or scaled-back opportunities for learning and knowledge exchange—further weakening technical capacity across the sector. These findings offer compelling evidence that the child protection system is under acute strain and that essential, life-saving services are being dismantled at the very moment when children need them most.

For children, these service disruptions are not abstract. They are translating into immediate and, in some cases, life-threatening consequences¹. Children separated from their families are being left without safe care arrangements or support to reunite with loved ones. Survivors of sexual violence are losing access to case management, psychosocial support, or referral pathways. Children living in detention, in displacement, or on the streets may be overlooked

¹ [Annex 2: Key messages on the essential and life-saving nature of child protection in humanitarian action](#)

entirely. As prevention programmes are deprioritised, risks multiply—violence at home goes unaddressed, child labour and child marriage become a means of survival, and exploitation thrives in the absence of protective communities and services.

These impacts must be understood within a growing recognition that the needs of children are integrated and interconnected.² The false dichotomy between “life-saving” interventions versus broader protection needs has been increasingly challenged³, and children’s needs are now widely understood as multidimensional and complex rather than one-dimensional and linear. As clearly articulated by the Convention on the Right of the Child, there is no hierarchy of rights. It is well recognised that children’s survival and well-being depends on safety and care as much as on food or medicine, and therefore their psychosocial needs cannot be considered inferior to their need for nutritious food. Therefore, while saving lives is critical to the humanitarian agenda, so are other efforts that contribute to protection of children from violence, exploitation, abuse, and neglect. While child protection programmes save lives, they go way beyond that by protecting children from short- and long-term harm.

At the same time, the humanitarian system is undergoing a ‘reset’⁴, driven by both funding constraints and ongoing calls for localisation and participation of affected populations. This planned shift presents opportunities to strengthen how child protection is delivered, including through more locally-led and locally-owned approaches, greater accountability to affected children, and child protection systems that are more sustainable and endure beyond crisis response. They require us to bridge the divide between humanitarian, development, and peace actors and strengthen and establish partnerships that enable a holistic approach to child protection.

The development of this Strategic Brief has been directly informed by these findings, trends, and new realities. The priorities and objectives outlined in the following sections are grounded in the lived realities reported by child protection practitioners responding to humanitarian crises around the world. They reflect an urgent need for coordinated action to prevent further erosion of protection systems, safeguard minimum standards, and ensure that children are not left behind in the reconfiguration of humanitarian response.

² Williamson, J., & Robinson, M. (2006). Psychosocial interventions, or integrated programming for well-being? *Intervention: International Journal of Mental Health, Psychosocial Work & Counselling in Areas of Armed Conflict*, 4(1), 4–25

³ <https://simplyputpsych.co.uk/psych-101-1/criticism-of-maslows-hierarchy-of-needs>; <https://positivepsychology.com/hierarchy-of-needs/#criticisms-of-the-hierarchy-of-needs>

⁴ <https://www.unocha.org/news/humanitarian-reset-0>

Principles and values

In addition to the core humanitarian principles,⁵ and those outlined in the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, the following principles and values underlie the implementation of this Strategic Brief:

- Supporting children in all their diversity;⁶
- Accountability to children;⁷
- Providing space for diverse members to participate in Alliance opportunities;⁸
- Committing to prevention of harm before it occurs;
- Recognising the holistic well-being of children, families, and communities through cross-sectoral collaboration.

3. STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Priority 1: Lead and support evidence-informed advocacy efforts that place children and their protection at the centre of humanitarian action

The Alliance plays a critical and enabling role in ensuring child protection remains a core pillar of humanitarian response. In the face of funding cuts and a rapidly changing humanitarian landscape, the Alliance supports evidence-based advocacy to drive investment in child protection and affirm its centrality in principled and effective humanitarian action.

⁵ www.corehumanitarianstandard.org

⁶ <https://alliancecpa.org/en/centrality-of-children-introduction>

⁷ <https://alliancecpa.org/en/technical-materials/desk-review-resource-mapping-accountability-children>

⁸ See pp. 23-25 of [A Clarion Call: The Centrality of Children and their Protection within Humanitarian Action](#)

P1. Objective 1: Protection of children is prioritised by key agencies, Alliance members, donors, governments, and humanitarian leadership

Strategic Approach: Efforts to protect children must be recognised as integral, essential, and cost-effective components of humanitarian action. Strengthening this recognition supports Alliance members in making informed internal decisions on resourcing, outreach, and donor engagement. It also reinforces efforts to champion child protection in wider decision-making forums, including Humanitarian Country Teams and within senior humanitarian leadership coordination bodies such as the IASC Principals and the Emergency Directors Group.

Key Actions:

- P1.O1.1: Conduct public and private engagement with key stakeholders to advocate for the centrality of children and their protection, drawing on evidence base generated under Objective 2.
- P1.O1.2: Develop and disseminate evidence-based advocacy tools and resources to support Alliance members in their advocacy efforts.
- P1.O1.3: Collaborate with strategic partners, including allies within the Child Protection in Humanitarian Action Sector, but also across broader sectors, ensuring a unified voice to centre children and their protection amidst funding cuts and changes across the humanitarian landscape.
- P1.O1.4: Advocate with existing child protection donors to continue to prioritise child protection and leverage their role as strategic allies to influence new donors and humanitarian leadership.
- P1.O1.5: Build partnerships to bring new donors into the child protection space through raising understanding and awareness of technical areas of child protection, which is then translated into resourcing for the sector. This includes corporate donors and foundations, and offering tailored opportunities for engagement in the Alliance networking spaces, for example, the Annual Meeting for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action.
- P1.O1.6: Develop concrete recommendations for humanitarian leadership on critical actions that can be taken to ensure Centrality of Protection objectives and obligations are met and how protecting children and families is essential to delivering on broader Community of Practice commitments.

P1. Objective 2: Existing evidence on the outcomes and impact of child protection services is synthesised to support advocacy efforts

Strategic Approach: Even before the current funding crisis, protection-focussed donors and policy makers were calling for a stronger evidence base for the outcomes of child protection interventions on children and their families. Some initial efforts, such as analysing CPIMS+ data, the Child Well-being Matters project to chart outcomes of case management, and the alternative care in emergencies survey, have begun to address this need. These have highlighted, for example, how coordination and government commitment are enablers for more consistent, child-centred outcomes.

In the context of ongoing funding cuts, there is now an urgent need to collate, and where missing, generate, high-quality, and where feasible, outcome focussed evidence to support targeted advocacy efforts as outlined under Objective 1. This also includes gathering and synthesising data demonstrating the scale and impact of funding cuts, building a compelling investment case for children protection, and to identify key evidence gaps for future action.

Key Actions:

- P1.O2.1: Develop a research agenda to identify evidence and data gaps to support the sector in the short and longer term.
- P1.O2.2: Build a compelling investment case for child protection in humanitarian action by:
 - P1.O2.2.1: Collating data and evidence—including case studies and testimonials—from across Alliance members and partners on the impact of funding cuts on programming, workforce capacity, and outcomes for children and their communities. Including an analysis of the ripple effects of funding cuts across broader humanitarian sectors, for example education, livelihoods, health, and GBV, and how these exacerbate child protection risks
 - P1.O2.2.2: Synthesising, translating, and disseminating evidence and data on the essential nature of core child protection services and strategies, drawing from a range of contexts and sources. This includes gathering evidence on the impact of integrated programming on both child protection and other sectoral outcomes.
 - P1.O2.2.3: Develop simple, targeted communication and advocacy products based upon the evidence and data gathered and collated.

Priority 2: Provide technical leadership for quality programming in line with the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (CPMS)

P2. Objective 1: Quality child protection-focussed technical products relevant to the emerging humanitarian landscape are available and meet the needs of diverse practitioners.

Strategic Approach: The Alliance has developed a wealth of technical guidance and tools to support child protection and broader humanitarian practitioners. As the custodian of key resources for humanitarian child protection, the Alliance will continue to promote access to and uptake of these resources by diverse community, local, national and international actors. Recognising the potential high turnover of staff that will be prompted by the funding crisis, likely double hatting of staff from a range of entities, and the ongoing expanded reach to community, local, and national actors, the Alliance will further support efforts to ensure consistent access to quality technical guidance and products in line with the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. Furthermore, considering the current and potentially enduring reduction in specialised child protection services it will be crucial to ensure that other sector actors can safely mainstream child protection and identify and refer children at heightened risk. As such the Alliance will work to promote uptake of resources that have been developed targeting other sectors.

Key Actions:

- P2.O1.1: Maintain Alliance online presence, including across languages and via communications / social media/ community of practice, to support awareness and uptake of the CPMS and existing and new technical resources.
- P2.O1.2: Outreach to Alliance members from across diverse contexts to promote technical collaboration, including through trialling mechanisms to more easily reach community, local, and national actors.
- P2.O1.3: Maintain accessibility of Alliance products to intended audiences, including front-line Child Protection workers and other sector actors, through effective communication, transfer of knowledge, and language solutions.
- P2.O1.4: Track engagement metrics to adapt communication and support methods to specific contexts and languages.

P2. Objective 2: Practitioners have strengthened Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (CPHA) learning and development opportunities

Strategic Approach: The Alliance will adapt learning opportunities to reflect the realities of a constrained CPHA workforce—limited time, resources, and capacity—while prioritising peer learning, cross-context exchange, and the meaningful engagement of local actors, including governments, academic institutions, and youth leaders. The Alliance will facilitate capacity sharing opportunities to strengthen peer learning and cross-context exchange. This approach seeks to maximise the impact of learning opportunities by leveraging collective knowledge and experience in a context of limited resources, across a range of levels and entities. Learning products and opportunities will also be adapted based upon the evolving needs of the sector.

Key Actions:

- P2.O2.1: Coordinate and align Learning and Development initiatives across technical areas and stakeholders, emphasising co-creation and capacity sharing with local partners.
- P2.O2.2: Promote access to high-quality learning resources via platforms such as Kaya, the CPHA Community of Practice, and the trainers mailing list.
- P2.O2.3: Explore and integrate responsible AI tools to personalise learning experiences, enhance language accessibility, and support real-time content adaptation based on user behaviour and needs.
- P2.O2.4: Strengthen evidence generation through case studies and context-specific reviews on the impact of quality Learning and Development initiatives.
- P2.O2.5: Develop a CPHA Learning Roadmap that reflects the evolving context and continue to identify capacity gaps and training needs, as well as guide regional dissemination strategies.
- P2.O2.6: Prioritise support to face-to-face regional learning opportunities, where funding allows, to strengthen localised capacity, foster peer-to-peer exchange, and deepen practitioner connection across contexts.

P2. Objective 3: Diverse practitioners inform, contribute to and have access to high-quality technical support that reflects and reinforces the CPMS and responds to country-level technical needs.

Strategic Approach: Reductions in funding have led to reduced technical assistance, whether provided in-country, regionally or globally, affecting a range of entities. In this context, it is important that diverse practitioners are supported with technical guidance and tools to make principled, evidence-informed decisions about how to adapt or maintain child protection programming without compromising quality. In addition to direct technical assistance provided by Alliance task forces, the Alliance will support practitioners to navigate constrained environments while adhering to the CPMS. According to need, technical resources will be adapted to ensure they are responsive to the changing humanitarian landscape, prioritising simple and accessible tools in multiple languages.

Key Actions:

- P2.O3.1: Contribute to ground-up technical support in liaison with coordination bodies and regional groups through response to technical queries and delivering technical clinics targeting specific contexts / in-country actors.
 - P2.O3.1.1: Response to technical queries in liaison with coordination bodies and regional groups.
 - P2.O3.1.2 Delivering technical clinics targeting specific contexts / in-country actors
- P2.O3.2: Fill gaps identified by practitioners by translating, adapting, updating or developing new technical products.
 - P2.O3.2.1: Capture gaps in existing guidance and tools, to inform modifications to products and standards for child protection prevention and response interventions.
 - P2.O3.2.2: Strengthen and maintain partnerships and collaboration to fill critical gaps in child protection products, such as updated guidance and tools on alternative care, diversity, and inclusion in case management.
- P2.O3.3: Support the uptake, and where needed, the adaptation of practical technical tools to enhance child protection mainstreaming, based on the Five Core Actions for Mainstreaming Child Protection in Sectoral Work and in line with Pillar 4 of the CPMS.⁹

⁹ CPMS Five Core Actions for Mainstreaming Child Protection in Sectoral Work are as follows: i) prioritising children's safety and wellbeing and doing no harm, ii) adapting services to the needs of children, child participation, communication and accountability, iii) ensuring safe and equitable access for children to humanitarian support, and iv) safe recognition, referral and response).

Priority 3: Alliance members have opportunities to collectively reflect, innovate, and act on emerging challenges to the protection of children in humanitarian crises in light of the current funding crisis

Given the inevitable changes that are on the horizon, for both the humanitarian sector and the child protection sector, the Alliance and its members will act as a catalyst for collective thinking and action to support the sector to adapt to the new reality, while keeping children and their protection at the centre.

P3. Objective 1: Promote meaningful investments in child protection systems, including national and local actors, to enable continuity of high-quality child protection in the evolving humanitarian landscape.

Strategic Approach: With the evolving humanitarian landscape, the need to strengthen national and local systems and actors, including leadership, is more critical than ever in humanitarian action. Ensuring equitable partnerships, local leadership, and capacity-strengthening - including institutional capacity of community, local and national actors - must remain a critical component of the efforts. This includes knowledge-sharing and co-creation, facilitated by strengthened partnerships with and capacity of communities and local actors, to ensure context-specific and locally-led, -informed, and -owned interventions for sustainability. Advocacy to donors, intermediaries, and other key stakeholders will focus on actions being taken by and in collaboration with government and other local actors and focus on institutionalisation for sustainability. How to do this at scale and at sufficient speed and quality in crises should be a key focus of collective reflection and action learning throughout implementation and feed the needed evidence base.

Key Actions:

- P3.O1.1: Facilitate collective reflection on the necessary reform within the CPHA sector towards locally-led, meaningful, and responsible transfer of power, expertise, and resources from international to national / local actors, to inform an Alliance position.
- P3.O1.2: Building on the position paper (1.1) issue a policy brief on the interface between child protection systems and humanitarian action, and the role of child protection actors along a continuum from active conflict to peace and development.
- P3.O1.3: Informed by a robust theory of change, identify key evidence gaps on sustainable approaches to and effectiveness of ground-up child protection, to prioritise for collective reflection, action, fundraising and advocacy.
- P3.O1.4: Develop simple, targeted communications materials to promote the existing evidence base for ground-up approaches to child protection with clear calls to action targeting new and existing donors and wider humanitarian actors.

- P3.O1.5: Use the convening space of the 2025 Annual Meeting to prompt action to strengthen the role of local communities, actors and systems in the future of humanitarian child protection, and strengthen messaging, advocacy and fundraising on ground-up approaches.
- P3.O1.6: Prompt action learning and collect case studies to understand and document the changing role of local actors and systems for child protection in humanitarian settings
- P3.O1.7: Work with key partners to explore context- and issue-specific connections between humanitarian, development, human rights, and peace efforts and actors for sustainable national child protection systems.

P3. Objective 2: Children and their protection remain central in technical and strategic discussions shaping humanitarian reform and within cross-sectoral ways of working

Strategic Approach: Under this objective, the Alliance will provide opportunities to key actors in the sector to bring together their expertise and diverse experiences to act as the “brain trust” of the sector. As part of its thought leadership role, the Alliance will facilitate discussions on the key question of “how can we ensure that children affected by humanitarian crises are protected from harm, despite the contracting fiscal and operational space for the CPHA sector.” This includes strengthening strategic collaborations across sectors to both mitigate protection risks children face but also to embed child protection as a critical component of effective humanitarian response. By working across silos and aligning with sector-wide reform efforts, the Alliance will support members to champion clear actions to operationalise centrality of children and their protection within national and global decision-making structures shaping the reform of the humanitarian architecture.

Key Actions:

- P3.O2.1: With strategic partners, co-develop a proactive vision on how child protection will be featured in the restructuring and reform of humanitarian architecture.
- P3.O2.2: Building on evidence and advocacy messages generated under Priority 1, collaborate with strategic sectors (e.g. education and the protection sectors) to explore joint positioning and messaging on specific aspects of the humanitarian reset that can support positioning children and their protection.
- P3.O2.3: Convene inter-agency discussion opportunities on strategic topics of relevance towards collective positions.

Key Enablers

The following enablers are critical to support the Alliance deliver on the priorities and their objectives outlined in this Strategic Brief:

Convening: The Alliance will continue playing a convening role for humanitarian child protection actors working at local, national, regional, and global levels to provide space and opportunities for strategic reflections, knowledge-sharing, and technical exchange.

Partnerships: The Alliance will continue to invest in building and strengthening strategic partnerships across the CPHA and wider humanitarian sector, as well as with broader actors across the development and peace nexus.

Communications: The Alliance will aim to expand its communications capacity to enhance the clarity and effectiveness of how we communicate the essential and critical nature of child protection, and the application of our technical standards and resources, to different stakeholders.

4. IMPLEMENTATION AND ADAPTATIONS

- **Implementation Plan:** This Strategic Brief will be supplemented by a workplan outlining and elaborating on the key actions.
- **Adaptive Management:** Due to the rapidly changing context, the evolving picture for resourcing of child protection amongst core Alliance members, and the re-set of the humanitarian architecture that is underway, the Strategic Brief and associated work plan will require a full review mid-way through. As a result, the following is planned:
 - At the 3-month point, the Secretariat will do a light-touch review of the Strategic Brief. Any necessary changes identified, will be discussed with the ExCom. If minor changes are needed, they will be done by the Secretariat, with support from the ExCom. If major changes are needed, they will be sent to the Steering Committee for no-objection.
 - At the 6-month point, a review will be initiated by the Secretariat, supported by the Steering Committee. The Work Plan will be revised at this point.