

# The Impact of Funding Cuts on Children and their Protection in Humanitarian Contexts

AN ANALYSIS ONE YEAR ON



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



# Acknowledgements

**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).**

**Cover Photo:**

UNICEF/UNI851873/Rajab

**Designed by:**

Affari Project

**Licence:** This document is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0.

It is attributed to the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (The Alliance).

This brief was researched and written by the Secretariat of the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action together with the Assessment, Measurement and Evidence Working Group, the Advocacy Working Group, and the Learning and Development Working Group. Important inputs and feedback were provided by Alliance member organisations, including the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), Plan International, Save the Children, the International Rescue Committee, and World Vision International. The brief also draws on the time and insights of more than 400 child protection practitioners across 68 countries who participated in the survey. Its development was supported by funding from Education Cannot Wait, the Government of Canada, and the Government of Norway.

**Suggested citation:** The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, The Impact of Funding Cuts on Children and their Protection in Humanitarian contexts: An Analysis One Year On (2026).





# Table of Contents

Executive Summary	4
Escalating Child Protection Violations	4
Contraction of Child Protection Services and Coverage	5
Erosion of Quality and Workforce Capacity	5
Constrained Adaptation and Systemic Fragility	6
Funding as a Proxy for Child Protection Capacity	6
The Direction of Travel	6
Methodology, Scope, and Limitations	7
Data Collection	7
One Year On: From Funding Shock to Systemic Deterioration	10
Impacts on Children: Escalating Risks and Deepening Harm	11
Rising Protection Risks Across Regions	11
Domains of Harm Most Affected	12
Illustrative Impact: Funding Cuts Felt Across Contexts	14
The Scale and Trajectory of Child Protection Funding Cuts	15
Widespread and Deepening Budget Reductions	15
Disproportionate Impacts Across Organisation Type	16
Regional Variation in Severity	18
Impacts on Child Protection Service Delivery and Access	19
Reduced Access to Child Protection Services	19
Organisational Adaptations to Reduced Funding Reflect Widespread Service Contraction	20
Growing Reliance on Community-based Child Protection Mechanisms	21
Disruptions to Core Child Protection Interventions	21
Impacts on Adherence to the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action	28
Workload Intensification	29
Loss of Technical Depth	29
Emerging Technical Gaps	31
Humanitarian-System Level Effects: Coordination and Humanitarian Reform	34
Emerging Practices and Innovations	36
Key Recommendations	37
1. Stabilise and Protect Child Protection Financing	37
2. Protect Quality and Technical Capacity as Core Protection Functions	38
3. Support National, Local, and Community-Based Actors	38
4. Support Strategic Prioritisation and Adaptation of Services	38
Concluding Note	39



# Executive Summary

## Escalating Child Protection Violations

One year on from the initial funding shocks of early 2025, the evidence is clear: what began as an abrupt financial disruption has now evolved into **a systemic deterioration of child protection services and capacity across humanitarian contexts**. Nearly three-quarters of respondents report that child protection violations have increased over the past year, with **45.1% observing a significant rise**.

This report draws on **401 complete survey responses from protection practitioners across 68 countries**, complemented by key informant interviews.

The deterioration is most acute in **conflict-affected contexts: 53% of respondents working in active conflict countries report risks increasing significantly**, compared with **26% in non-conflict settings**.

The most frequently reported increases relate to:

- **Deterioration in children’s mental health and psychosocial well-being (54%)**
- **Sexual and gender-based violence (50%)**
- **Physical and emotional maltreatment (46%)**
- **Child labour (45%)**

**Family separation and recruitment and use of children by armed forces and armed groups are also rising** across multiple contexts, particularly in active conflict settings.

These trends are **unfolding in contexts already marked by escalating conflict and violence, displacement, economic stress, climate shocks, and shrinking protection space**. At the same time, **funding cuts are weakening the systems and services intended to mitigate these risks**, leaving many children exposed to escalating harm with fewer avenues for protection.

As one respondent reflected: “Funding cuts do not just affect services. They affect childhoods. Every reduced programme, every delayed appointment, every lost opportunity chips away at children’s confidence, safety, and future.”

— Respondent from Nepal



## Contraction of Child Protection Services and Coverage

The overwhelming majority of respondents (91%) report that children’s access to child protection services has declined since January 2025. **Nearly one-quarter report that services have closed entirely in some locations**, while over **one-third report significant reductions**.

Organisations are adapting by reducing **reach** and **operational footprint**:

- **55%** report reductions in the number of children served
- **55%** report reductions in geographic coverage
- **53%** report reductions in staff presence or field monitoring
- **46%** report the suspension or closing of activities

Core child protection interventions are being disrupted across the spectrum. Among organisations implementing these services, the most affected include:

- **MHPSS and group activities for children’s well-being (64%)**
- **Cash and voucher assistance for child protection outcomes (63%)**
- **Programmes addressing Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (59%)**
- **Case management (58%)**

This represents **widespread retrenchment: fewer children in fewer locations receiving fewer services precisely as violations intensify**.

Although funding environments have increasingly emphasised narrowly defined “lifesaving” activities, the data shows that **even critical response services, such as case management, are not insulated from severe cuts**. Preventive approaches, including family strengthening and community-based protection, are also being reduced.

The result is not strategic reprioritisation but overall contraction: **preventive mechanisms are shrinking, while core response functions are being hollowed out**.

## Erosion of Quality and Workforce Capacity

The contraction is affecting not only coverage, but the **quality and integrity of child protection programming**. More than **60% of respondents** report significant impacts on their ability to meet the **Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action**.

Excessive workloads, reduced supervision, shrinking specialised services, and weakened safeguarding and accountability mechanisms are undermining programme quality across contexts.

Child protection’s core asset — **its workforce** — is under severe strain across UN agencies, international and national NGOs, and local and community-based organisations. Recruitment freezes, loss of technical advisers, and reduced capacity-strengthening are further eroding programme quality.





Technical gaps within responding organisations are most acute in MHPSS and group-based activities for child well-being (35%) and case management (34%), areas in which respondents also report significant operational disruption.

## Constrained Adaptation and Systemic Fragility

While organisations describe adapting to funding reductions, the evidence suggests these measures have largely involved adjustments to programme scope. These often include scaling back coverage, prioritising the highest-risk cases, and reducing preventive approaches.

Where adaptation is occurring, it increasingly relies on **community-based actors**, including volunteers, to maintain frontline presence. Yet, these actors report some of the most severe funding cuts, and community-based child protection approaches are being significantly disrupted.

At the same time, **national and sub-national coordination structures**, which are reported as the primary source of technical support for local and community-based actors, are themselves under pressure within wider humanitarian reform and consolidation processes.

These dynamics raise concerns about the **sustainability, coherence, and quality of child protection delivery under prolonged financial uncertainty**.

## Funding as a Proxy for Child Protection Capacity

Behind these trends lies sustained financial contraction.

Since January 2025:

- 84% of respondents report cuts to their child protection budgets
- 50% report losing more than 40% of their funding
- 12% report reductions exceeding 80%, leading to the elimination of services in some locations

Funding levels are not merely financial indicators—they function as a **proxy for whether the humanitarian system has the capacity to prevent harm, respond to violations, and uphold standards**.

## The Direction of Travel

What began as funding volatility is moving towards **systemic restructuring of humanitarian child protection capacity**.

As financing declines across sectors, risk factors for violence, exploitation, recruitment, separation, and other types of harm to children increase. Preventive systems and protective environments are narrowing or disappearing, while response services are hollowing out.

Without urgent, corrective action, these trends risk **reversing hard-won gains and leaving a generation to bear consequences that will extend far beyond the current funding crisis**.





# Methodology, Scope, and Limitations

This briefing is based on a second round of global data collection led by the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action to assess the evolving impact of humanitarian funding cuts on children and their protection in humanitarian contexts. It builds upon the first collection conducted in March–April 2025, retaining core questions to enable comparability over time, while incorporating additional questions to capture emerging dynamics.

## Data Collection

### Online Survey

A global online survey was conducted between December 2025 and January 2026. The survey combined primarily closed-ended questions to enable structured analysis with a limited number of open-ended questions to capture qualitative insights. It was disseminated through Alliance communication channels with targeted outreach to civil society, grassroots, and country-level practitioners. To support broad participation, it was translated into Arabic, French, and Spanish.

A total of **401 complete responses** were analysed. Respondents were asked to report based on their primary geographic level of operation, with a focus on those based close to the point of impact.

### Geographic Coverage

The survey reflects responses from practitioners across 68 countries, providing a broad geographic representation.

Participation was strongest in Africa (47%), followed by the Americas (14%), the Middle East and North Africa (12%), Asia-Pacific (11%), and Europe and Central Asia (4%). A further 6.0% of respondents reported operating at global level, while 6.0% did not specify a region. While coverage is geographically diverse, the higher response rate from Africa means that aggregate findings are influenced more strongly by perspectives from that region.

Survey participation was concentrated in several contexts, including Nigeria (49 responses), the Central African Republic (26), Somalia (17), the Syrian Arab Republic (17), and the State of Palestine (14). This concentration suggests that aggregate findings may reflect more strongly the operational realities of these high-response settings.

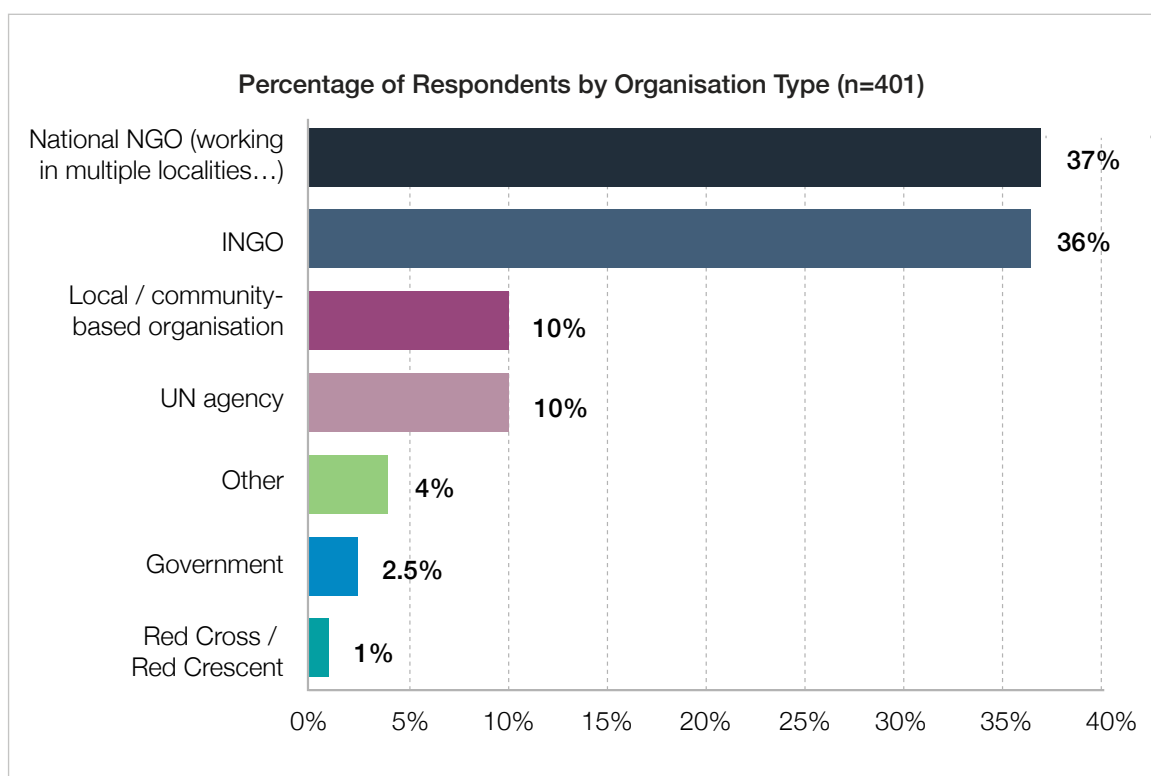




## Organisational Profile

Respondents represent a range of organisation types:

Figure 1: Organisation Types



National and international NGOs constitute the clear majority of respondents. As a result, the findings primarily reflect the perspectives of operational child protection actors directly engaged in programme delivery. Representation from government is comparatively limited, meaning system-level or state-level perspectives may be less prominently captured in the dataset.

### Key Informant Interviews (KIIs):

To complement survey findings, 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted with members of the Alliance at global, regional, and country levels. The interviews explored funding trends, service delivery impacts, staffing and capacity implications, cross-sectoral effects, and emerging adaptations.

The KIIs provided qualitative depth to contextualise survey trends and identified system-level implications not captured through survey questions.

### Data Management and Analysis

Survey responses were compiled and cleaned prior to analysis to ensure consistency and to remove duplicate or incomplete entries where necessary. Quantitative findings are presented using descriptive statistics, with cross-tabulations used to explore patterns across organisation types, regions, and operational levels.





Qualitative data from open-ended survey responses and KIs were analysed thematically. Findings were triangulated across data sources to strengthen interpretation and provide both quantitative breadth and qualitative depth.

### Limitations

Findings reflect self-reported organisational data and practitioner perceptions rather than independently verified financial or administrative datasets. Responses are not weighted by country size, funding volume, or population.

However, the consistency of patterns reported across regions, organisation types, and data sources indicates clear and systemic trends affecting child protection in humanitarian action globally.

As per the CPMS, the survey questions referred to child protection risks to mean child protection violations or harm. In this report, we use violations and harm interchangeably to signify actual harm, rather than the risk of harm.

### Notes

(i) All percentages in this report are rounded to the nearest whole number.

(ii) Conflict settings have been identified based upon countries included in the [2025 Annual Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict](#).



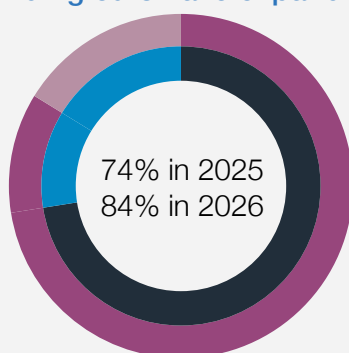
Image Credit: UNICEF/UNI790024/Sánchez



# One Year On: From Funding Shock to Systemic Deterioration

In March–April 2025, the Alliance's first global snapshot documented the immediate shock of mainly United States Government humanitarian funding cuts, alongside broader patterns of donor governments shifting money away from humanitarian assistance. One year later, the evidence shows that the crisis has widened and deepened.

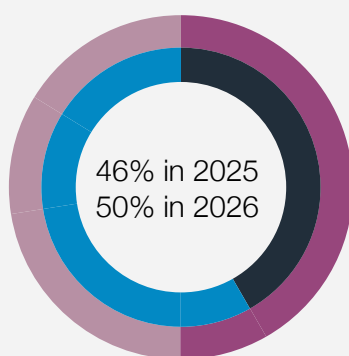
## Funding cuts have expanded:



- 2025 survey: 74% of respondents reported funding cuts
- 2026 survey: 84% of respondents report operational budget reductions

## Severity of cuts has intensified:

- 2025 survey: 46% had lost more than 40% of child protection funding
- 2026 survey: 50% have lost more than 40% of child protection funding, and 12% report reductions of 81–100%, effectively eliminating services in some locations



## Short-term disruption has evolved into sustained contraction:

The first brief highlighted immediate programme suspensions and staffing reductions, as a temporary measure. Respondents also warned that cuts across other sectors, including health, education, and food security, amongst others, would increase risks for children's protection.

One year later, these warnings are increasingly reflected in the evidence. Respondents report shrinking access to child protection services, erosion of referral systems, a reduced and overstretched workforce, and growing inability to meet the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action.

## Rising child protection harms:

Alongside service contraction, many respondents now report **increases in key protection harms**, including sexual violence, mental health and psychosocial distress, and child maltreatment. What began as abrupt funding volatility in early 2025 has evolved into sustained contraction across both protection services and the broader systems children rely on to stay safe.



# Impacts on Children: Escalating Risks and Deepening Harm

Funding reductions are often recorded in terms of impact is borne by children themselves, leaving them increasingly exposed to violence, exploitation, abuse, and neglect. The Alliance survey data demonstrates a consistent and cross-regional deterioration in children's protection since January 2025. At a time when needs are intensifying, the failure to sustain investment in child protection in humanitarian action is directly undermining children's safety and well-being.

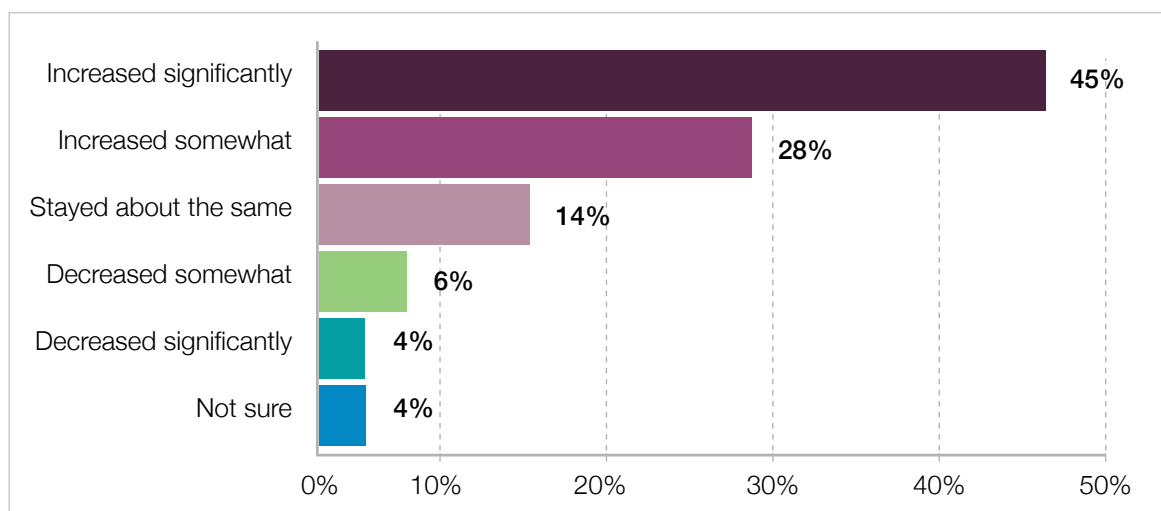


## Rising Protection Risks Across Regions

The findings reveal a worrying surge in child protection risks since January 2025. Nearly three-quarters of respondents report that children's protection risks have increased over the past year. 45% observed a significant rise, while a further 28% reported a moderate increase. The pattern is evident across every region. The steepest increases are reported by respondents from the Middle East and North Africa (77%), followed by Africa (74%) and Asia-Pacific (74%), with similarly high levels in Europe and Central Asia (71%), and the Americas (63%).

While these can be attributed to increasing instability, conflict, and displacement, they are also likely a direct result of funding cuts across all humanitarian sectors, such as education, food security, and health. This is because many of the risk factors of protection harms lie within other sectors.

Figure 2: Changes to child protection risks since January 2025





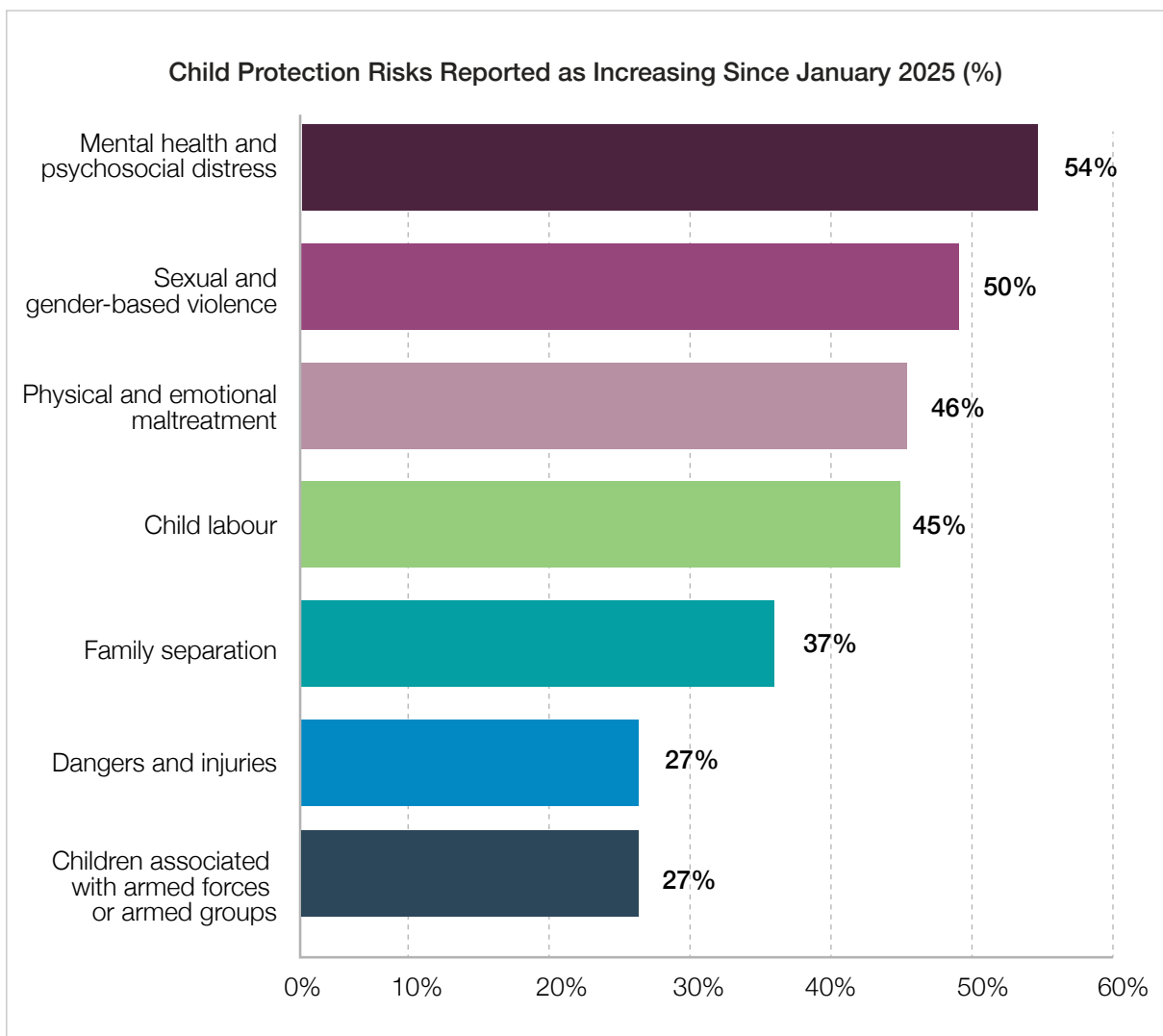
## Domains of Harm Most Affected

Respondents report sharp increases in multiple child protection violations since January 2025. The most frequently cited was deterioration in children’s mental health and psychosocial well-being (54%), followed by sexual and gender-based violence (50%), physical and emotional maltreatment (46%), and child labour (45%).

Increases are also reported in family separation (37%), dangers and injuries (27%), and children associated with armed forces or armed groups (26%). While reported at lower overall levels, these violations remain significant and are particularly concentrated in conflict-affected contexts.

The data suggest that no domain of child protection has been insulated from the effects of the funding crisis.

Figure 3: Child Protection Violations Reported as Increasing Since January 2025





## Conflict Settings: Where Increases in Child Protection Violations Are Most Pronounced

Further analysis of responses from conflict-affected contexts highlights that the increases in child protection violations described above are most pronounced in countries experiencing active armed conflict.

Of the 401 survey respondents, 236 (69% of those providing country information) reported operating in countries affected by active conflict.

Respondents working in these settings report significantly higher levels of deterioration in children's protection compared to those in non-conflict contexts. More than three-quarters (76.7%) of respondents in conflict-affected countries report that child protection violations have increased, compared with 65.1% in non-conflict countries.

The difference is particularly striking when examining the severity of these increases. 53% of respondents from conflict settings report that violations have increased significantly, compared with 26% from non-conflict contexts.

Several violations show especially large disparities between conflict and non-conflict settings:

- Dangers and injuries: 36% in conflict settings vs 9% in non-conflict contexts
- Recruitment and use of children by armed forces or armed groups: 32% vs 9%
- Family separation: 43% vs 24%
- Child labour: 53% vs 31%

These findings indicate that funding reductions are interacting with conflict dynamics to produce a sharper deterioration in children's safety, as protective services contract in environments where exposure to violence, displacement, and economic stress is already extremely high.





## Illustrative Impact: Funding Cuts Felt Across Contexts

Field evidence illustrates how these risks are manifesting in practice. In Colombia, practitioners report a marked increase in child recruitment by non-state armed groups in several regions. In Haiti, respondents describe growing numbers of children separated from their families and drawn into armed gangs, alongside rising trafficking, sexual violence, and cross-border expulsions of unaccompanied children. In Nigeria, partners report a sharp increase in exploitation and abuse, with adolescent girls resorting to hazardous labour and facing heightened exposure to sexual violence, and early marriage becoming more prevalent in affected communities.

In Somalia, reduced funding has constrained family tracing and follow-up for unaccompanied and separated children, leaving many in prolonged unsafe living arrangements. For example, in Lower Shabelle, the closure of a safe learning centre left more than 120 displaced children without education or psychosocial support; some have since entered unsafe labour, while others face increased risk of early marriage or recruitment into harmful activities.

Across settings, respondents consistently report that as protective environments contract, children are navigating escalating risks with reduced adult support and fewer safe alternatives. Children who previously benefited from monitoring, follow-up, or structured support are now left to cope alone in contexts marked by violence, economic stress, and instability.

**“Funding cuts do not just affect services. They affect childhoods. Every reduced program, every delayed appointment, every lost opportunity chips away at children’s confidence, safety, and future. For many, the effects are long-lasting and shape lives in ways that budgets can never fully account for.”**

— Respondent from Nepal

The direction of travel is clear. As financing declines, children’s exposure to violence, exploitation, recruitment, separation, and psychological harm increases. The cumulative effect is a sustained erosion of the conditions that keep children safe, with consequences that will extend far beyond the immediate crisis period.



# The Scale and Trajectory of Child Protection Funding Cuts

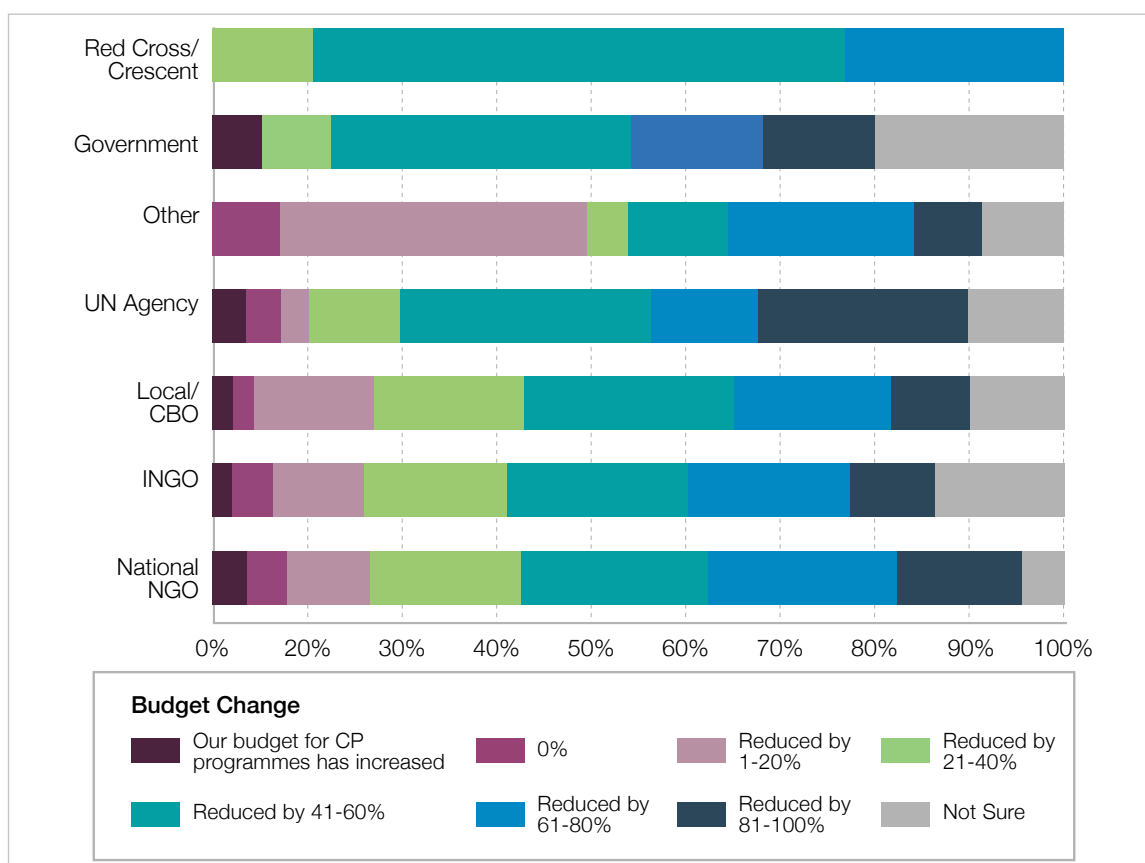
## Widespread and Deepening Budget Reductions

The Alliance's global survey of **401 respondents across 68 countries** confirms that funding reductions to child protection programming are widespread and severe. Since January 2025:

- **84%** report cuts to their child protection operations
- **50%** report losing **more than 40%** of their funding
- **12%** report reductions of 81–100%, eliminating services in some locations
- **Only 3%** report an increase in child protection programme budgets

For the Alliance, analysing funding trends is not only about financial flows. Funding levels act as a proxy for **whether the humanitarian system has the capacity to prevent harm, respond to violations, and sustain child protection services on the ground**. As these reductions deepen, many organisations can no longer sustain the coverage or continuity of child protection programming at the scale required.

Figure 4: Operational Budget Changes by Organisation Type





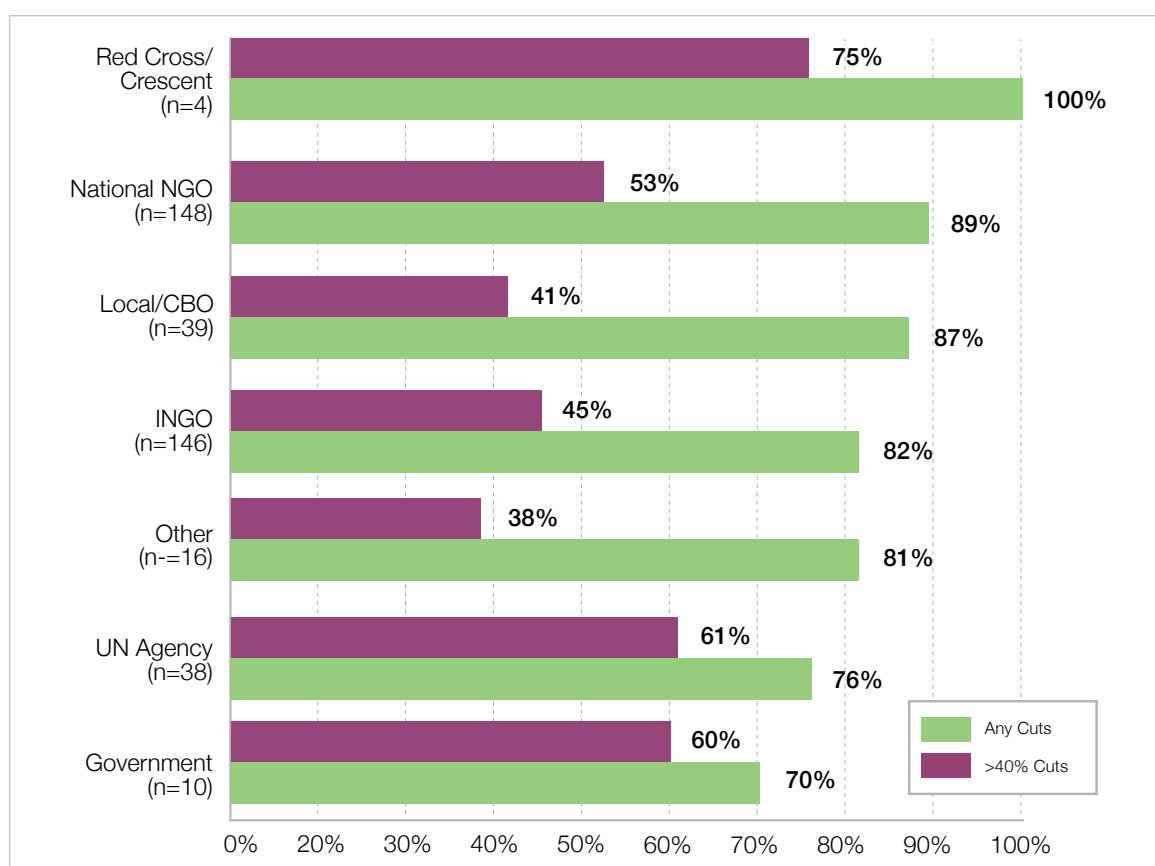
## Disproportionate Impacts Across Organisation Type

Funding reductions are affecting all organisation types. However, the scale and implications of these cuts vary across actors.

National NGOs and local/community-based organisations report the highest incidence of funding reductions overall: **89% of national NGOs and 87% of local/community-based organisations** report cuts to their child protection budgets since January 2025. In addition, over half (53%) of national NGO respondents report losing more than 40% of their child protection funding.

Severe reductions are also reported across other parts of the child protection architecture, with 60% of UN agencies and government respondents indicating cuts exceeding 40%, while 45% of INGOs report reductions above this threshold. Although INGOs report slightly lower rates of severe cuts compared to national NGOs and UN actors, the breadth of reductions across all organisation types signals systemic contraction.

Figure 5: Organisations Reporting Severe Cuts (>40%) by Type



The implications of these patterns are significant. National and local actors often maintain the closest and most sustained presence in crisis-affected communities. Disproportionate funding loss among these organisations risk weakening frontline service delivery, community engagement, and locally anchored child protection mechanisms.





These trends also have implications for the localisation agenda, where humanitarian actors have increasingly committed to ensure design and implementation of programming is done as locally as possible, recognising this is both a good practice and essential to sustainable impact.

The disproportionate impact of current cuts on national and local actors suggests that progress in this area may remain fragile. There is a risk that hard-won gains in strengthening local leadership and capacity could be undermined if these organisations are not sustained through the contraction.

At the same time, substantial cuts reported by UN agencies and INGOs may constrain not only their own operational programming, but also the technical support, partnership arrangements, sub-granting mechanisms, and coordination functions through which the work of local actors is sustained.

These trends demonstrate mounting pressure across the entire child protection ecosystem, where reductions at one level reverberate across others.

**“We had a large network of civil society partners. Now many have closed — and they were the closest to communities.”**

— Key Informant Interview, Latin America and Caribbean



UNICEF/UN0798784/Sujan



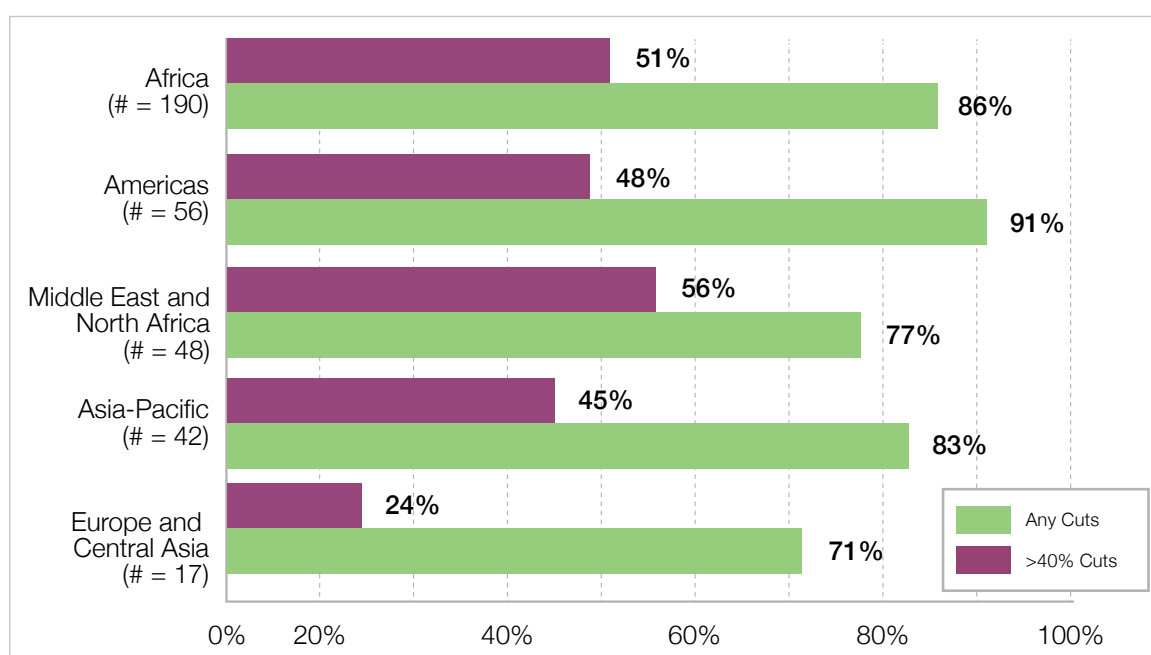


## Regional Variation in Severity

Child protection funding cuts are being reported across all regions. Respondents in the Americas report the highest rate of any reductions (91.1%). Severe cuts are particularly pronounced in the Middle East and North Africa and Africa, where 56% and 67% respondents report cuts above 40%, respectively.

While Europe and Central Asia report comparatively lower rates of severe reductions, the overall pattern remains one of significant and widespread funding decline.

Figure 6: Severe Child Protection Cuts by Region



## Funding Outlook and Pipeline Fragility for 2026

Across key informant interviews, organisations emphasised that the funding environment remains highly unstable. Many described growing concerns around proposal pipelines not being renewed, second-phase grants not being approved, and limited availability of alternative funding sources.

“New child protection proposals are not being approved, and second phases are increasingly not being funded.”

— Key Informant Interview, Global Child Protection Actor

As a result, many agencies anticipate further contraction into 2026, with reduced capacity to sustain staffing, partnerships, and programme continuity. Without urgent action, these trends risk dismantling child protection systems precisely when needs are rising, reversing hard-won gains and leaving children without essential protection support.





# Impacts on Child Protection Service Delivery and Access

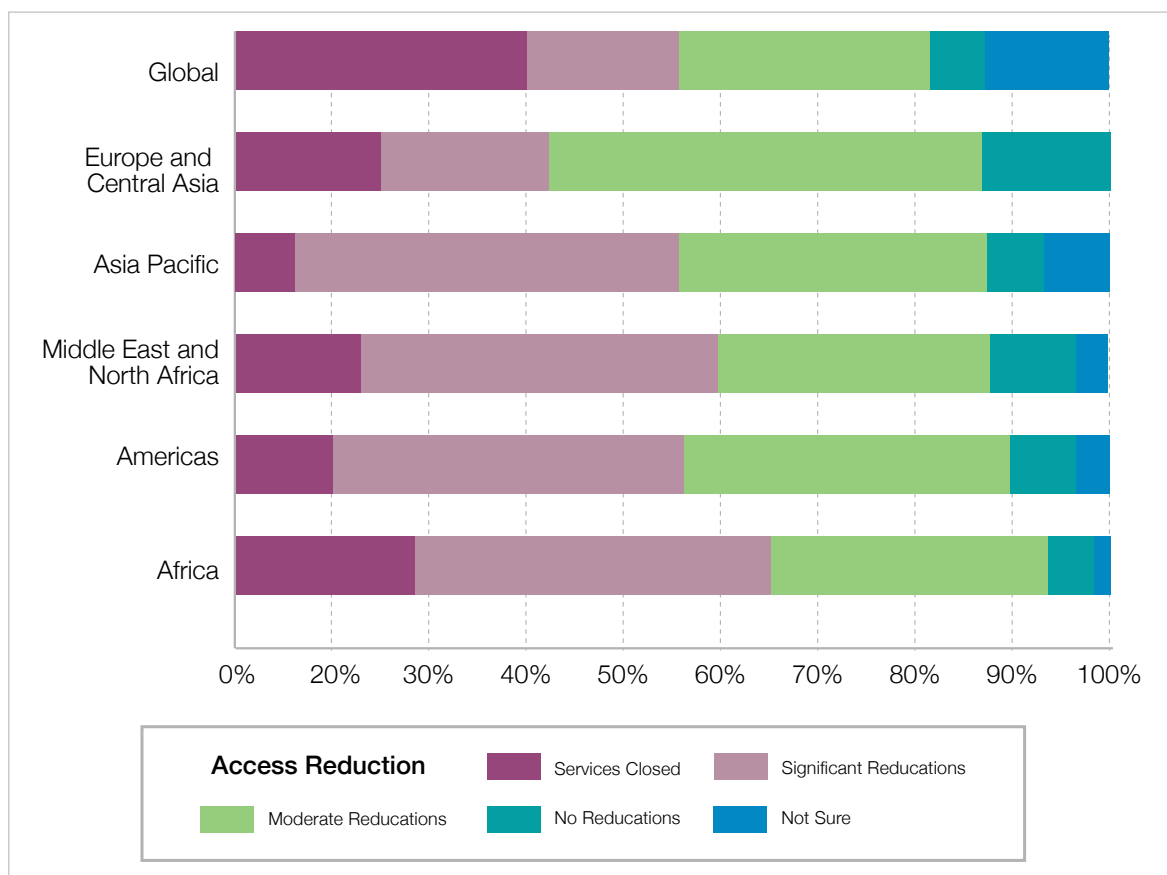
## Reduced Access to Child Protection Services

The overwhelming majority of respondents (91%) report that children’s access to child protection services has been reduced due to funding cuts, with only 6% reporting no change. Most critically, nearly a quarter (23%) report that services have closed entirely in some locations, and over a third (37%) report significant reductions—meaning 6.4% of respondents are witnessing severe impacts on service availability.

Regional patterns show uneven but widespread impact. Africa reports the most pronounced reduction in access, with 96% of respondents noting diminished availability and 67% reporting significant reductions or closures. Although Asia-Pacific, Europe, and Central Asia report comparatively lower levels of severe impact at 49% and 41% respectively, the majority of respondents in every region indicate that children’s access to protection services has declined.

These findings confirm that funding cuts are reducing the physical and functional availability of child protection services in multiple contexts. In practice, this weakens prevention efforts and response capacity alike, leaving more children exposed to harm and fewer able to access timely support.

Figure 7: Reduction in Access to Child Protection Services by Region





## Organisational Adaptations to Reduced Funding Reflect Widespread Service Contraction

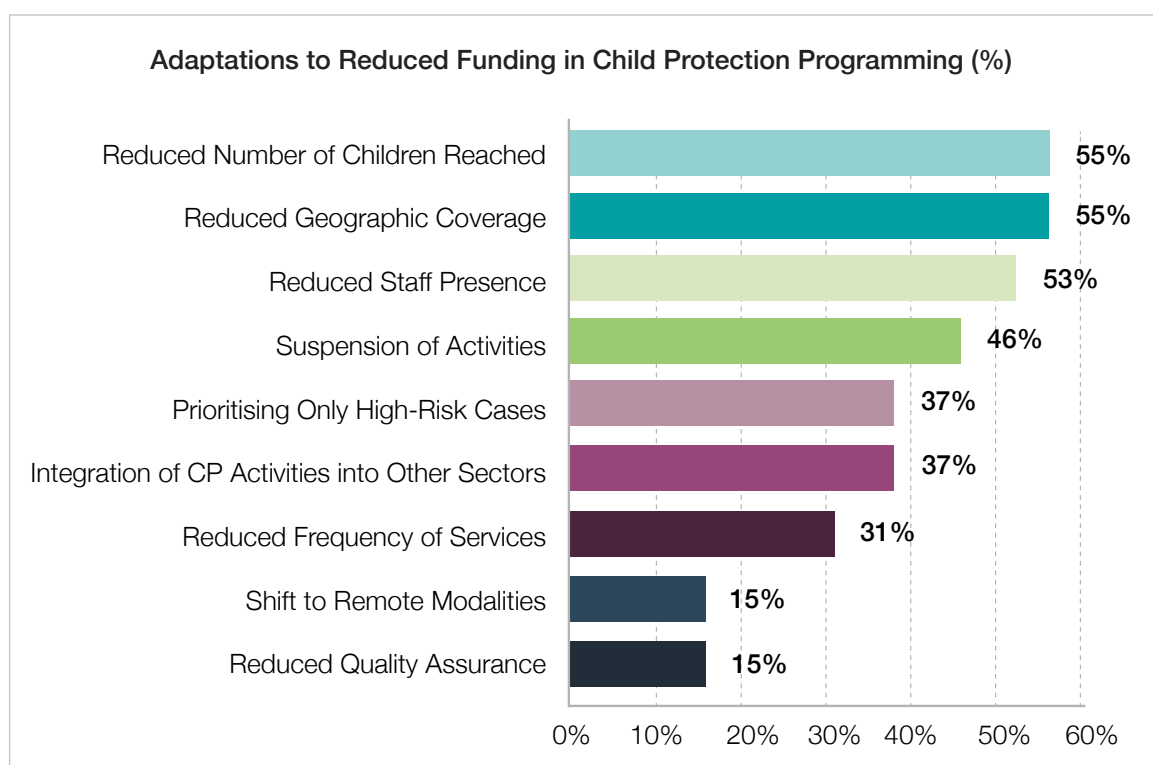
Survey responses indicate that most organisations are adapting to reduced funding through measures that directly shrink the reach and footprint of child protection programming. The most commonly reported strategies involve reducing the number of children reached, narrowing geographic coverage, and decreasing staff presence or field monitoring. Many organisations also report suspending or closing specific activities or services.

More than one-third of organisations also reported prioritising only the highest-risk cases or integrating child protection into other sectors to reduce costs.

While these strategies may help maintain limited service continuity, respondents cautioned that they often come at the expense of preventive outreach, sustained follow-up, and the ability to respond before risks escalate.

Overall, these findings suggest that the dominant adaptation is retrenchment: **fewer children in fewer locations receiving fewer services**, alongside increasing reliance on lower-cost, lighter-touch modalities at a time when risks are escalating and technical capacity is declining.

Figure 8: Adaptations to Reduced Funding in Child Protection Programming





## Growing Reliance on Community-based Child Protection Mechanisms

Community-based child protection approaches are emerging as a central feature of how actors are adapting to funding contraction. Respondents frequently cited community-based mechanisms as a key strategy for maintaining some level of protection presence where formal services are shrinking. However, these same approaches are also among the interventions most affected by funding cuts, with 41% of respondents reporting impacts on community-based child protection activities. In practice, this reflects a growing reliance on community actors to compensate for reduced professional staffing, however often without corresponding investment in training, supervision, or financial support. The implications of this shift are explored further in the sections on Child Protection Interventions Most Affected by Funding Cuts and Emerging Practices and Innovations.

This reflects a broader pattern: adaptation under constraint rather than strategic strengthening. Local and community-based actors are assuming greater implementation responsibility as international presence contracts, yet many report limited access to predictable funding, capacity-strengthening, or technical backstopping.

## Disruptions to Core Child Protection Interventions

Funding cuts are translating directly into reduced access for children to core child protection interventions across humanitarian settings. Survey findings indicate that services requiring sustained staffing and specialised expertise are among the most affected. Key informants further emphasised that workforce reductions and weakened referral pathways are leaving children without consistent follow-up or safe pathways to care.

Abrupt service closures have left high-risk children without essential follow-up: thousands of children losing access to case management, nearly half of Child-Friendly Spaces closing in some operations, and active protection cases being terminated in mid-process.



Image Credit: UNICEF/UNI792784/Herold Joseph

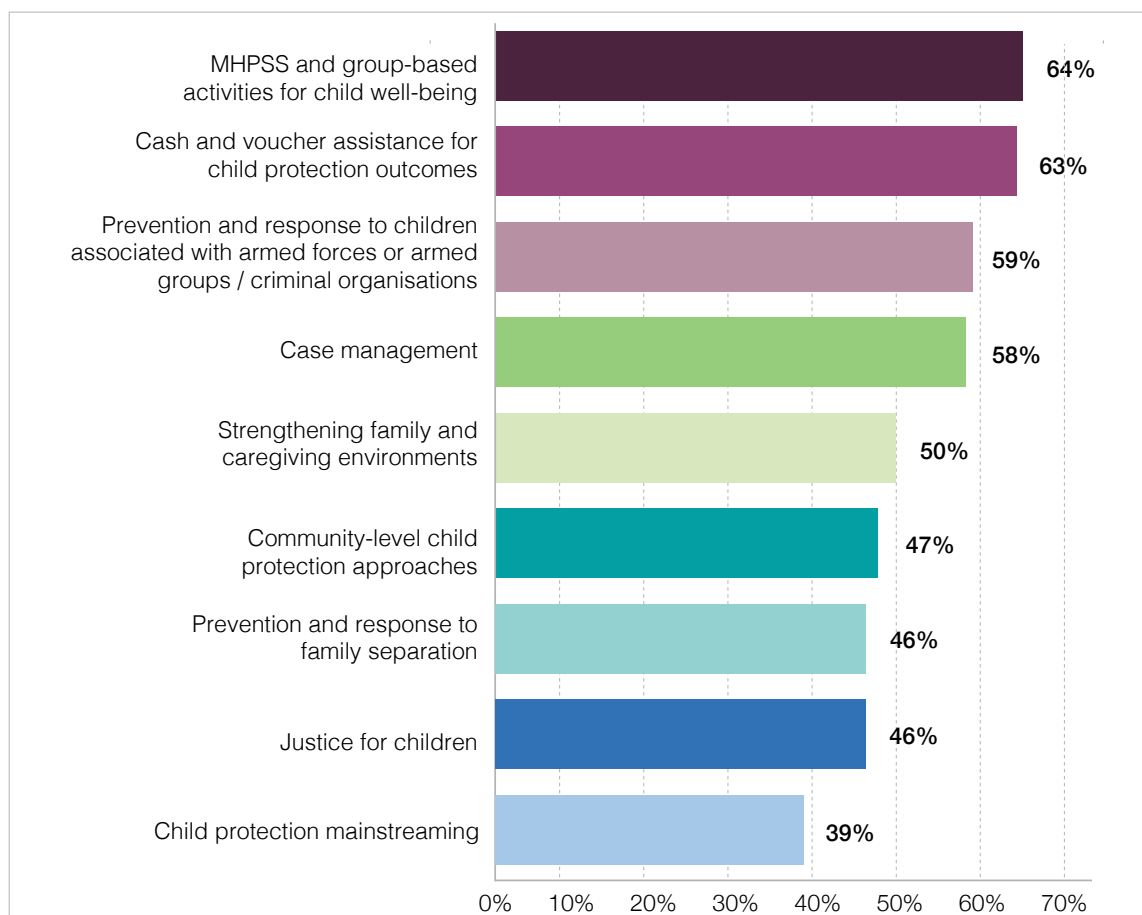




The analysis examined the proportion of organisations implementing each intervention that report reductions to that service.

Reductions are reported across all major areas of child protection programming. Among organisations implementing each intervention, the proportion reporting cuts is as follows:

Figure 9: Child Protection Services Most Affected by Reductions or Closures



These findings indicate reductions across the full spectrum of child protection programming, affecting both specialised response services and preventive community-based interventions. Particularly concerning is the scale of disruption to case management and MHPSS and group activities for children’s well-being, which form the backbone of many humanitarian child protection responses and provide critical entry points for identifying and supporting children at risk.

The high proportion of organisations reporting reductions in cash assistance for child protection outcomes and programmes supporting children associated with armed forces or armed groups suggests that services targeting highly vulnerable groups are also under significant strain.

These findings point to a broad contraction in child protection programming. While funding environments increasingly emphasise narrowly defined “lifesaving” activities, the scale of reductions suggests that both preventive services and critical response mechanisms are being affected simultaneously. This risks weakening the layered protection systems needed to identify risks early, respond to abuse and exploitation, and support children’s recovery and well-being.





## Regional Variation in Child Protection Service Disruptions

While disruptions to child protection services are reported across all regions, the scale and pattern of impacts varies.

MHPSS and group activities for children's well-being are the most consistently affected intervention across most regions. The highest levels of disruption are reported in the Americas (69.6%), Europe and Central Asia (66.7%), and MENA (64.4%).

Case management also shows considerable regional variation, with the highest level of disruption reported in the Americas (75%). Africa (57%) and MENA (52.5%) fall near the overall average, while Europe and Central Asia (50%) and Asia-Pacific (43.5%) report somewhat lower rates.

Overall, 62.7% respondents report disruptions to cash and voucher assistance for child protection, and levels remain consistently high (over 60%) across all regions. The Americas (78.6%) and Europe and Central Asia (75%) report the highest rates, the latter likely reflecting the [prominence of cash-based programming](#) in responses such as Ukraine, where humanitarian assistance has relied heavily on cash modalities.

Community-based child protection approaches show the highest reported impacts in Asia-Pacific (56%) and Africa (52%), indicating significant disruption to community-based prevention-oriented programming in these regions.

Programmes supporting children associated with armed forces or armed groups also show variation across regions. Africa (65.8%), and the Americas (62.5%) report high levels of disruption among providers, reflecting the concentration of such programming in contexts affected by armed conflict and armed violence, while Asia-Pacific reports comparatively lower levels.



Image Credit: NICEF/UNI920445/Jospin Benek





In Latin America and the Caribbean, key informants further highlighted that the withdrawal of reintegration support for returning migrant children has created major gaps that governments are unable to absorb, leaving vulnerable children without critical services previously provided by humanitarian actors.

### **Impacts on MHPSS and Group-Based Activities for Children’s Well-being**

MHPSSs and group activities for children’s well-being is the most affected intervention category, with 64% of organisations implementing these services reporting reductions.

Across contexts, these activities are repeatedly described as early casualties of funding reductions, despite being critical entry points for prevention, identification of protection concerns, and referral to specialised services.

Respondents described the immediate loss of safe environments where children could play, learn, and receive emotional support, as well as the loss of trusted facilitators who had built relationships with children and communities.

In displacement camps and conflict-affected communities, these spaces had often been the only protective environment available to children. Their closure left many children spending more time in unsafe environments, increasing exposure to violence, exploitation, and other harmful activities. Several respondents noted that the loss of structured activities and protective supervision contributed to increased child labour, early marriage, and recruitment risks as children lost safe alternatives.

In Kakuma refugee camp, Kenya, funding cuts have forced agencies to downsize child-friendly spaces, recreational activities, and psychosocial support. Respondents reported fewer trained staff available to monitor abuse, exploitation, family separation, and sexual violence.

Similarly, in Gaza, where UNICEF has [reported 100% of children have MHPSS needs](#), the suspension of group well-being activities and safe spaces has removed one of the only structured environments available to children living under bombardment and displacement. Caregivers described increased anxiety, withdrawal, aggression, and loss of coping skills among children following the reduction of these services.

### **Impacts on Programming for Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups/Criminal Organisations**

Fifty-nine percent of organisations implementing programmes supporting children associated with armed forces or armed groups report reductions.

These programmes play a critical role in preventing recruitment, supporting disengagement from armed actors, and facilitating reintegration for children leaving armed groups. Respondents reported that funding cuts are affecting both prevention activities and reintegration support, weakening protective mechanisms for children in conflict-affected contexts.

In several settings, respondents described how reductions in specialised programming are increasing risks for children. In the Central African Republic, reintegration support for children formerly associated with armed groups has been scaled back, increasing the likelihood of re-recruitment when children lose access to services and basic assistance. One key informant reported that, due to the lack of sustained support following funding cuts:





**“Children who left armed groups due to lack of support because of cuts are forced to rejoin armed groups to have food to eat.”**

**– Respondent from the Central African Republic**

Respondents also noted that the reduction of community-based protection services and safe spaces in conflict-affected areas has weakened monitoring and early identification of recruitment risks. In some contexts, children from economically vulnerable households were reported to see joining armed groups as a survival strategy when assistance programmes were reduced.

### **Impacts on Case Management**

Case management, widely regarded as core protection interventions for children at highest risk, is also significantly affected. Fifty-eight percent of organisations implementing case management report reductions to this service.

These reductions reflect staffing cuts, weakened supervision, and declining operational continuity. Even in funding environments that increasingly prioritise narrowly defined “lifesaving” activities, the data indicates that case management is not insulated from severe contraction.

In Uganda, caseworkers who previously managed approximately 25 cases are now responsible for up to 100 children each. At this scale, thorough assessment, individualised case planning, safety planning, and regular follow-up become impossible to sustain. Practitioners report a shift toward triage, with only the most acute cases receiving sustained attention.

Shortened project cycles further undermine continuity. In Lebanon, respondents noted that while complex cases may require six to nine months of engagement, funding often supports only partial intervention, weakening Best Interests processes and long-term case outcomes.

Excessive caseloads, reduced supervision, declining technical capacity, and shortened timelines are eroding quality. In Latin America, caseworkers report increasingly seeking ad hoc guidance from technical advisers on individual cases due to reduced supervisory capacity. While this may mitigate immediate risk to individual clients, it reflects a system that is breaking down because of the weakening of structured supervision mechanisms that underpin safe and effective case management.

The weakening of referral ecosystems compounds these pressures. As one respondent explained:

**“The referral pathway and service mapping have been significantly affected due to many institutions and organisations closing their programs due to funding shortages.”**

These findings indicate that funding cuts are reducing coverage and also progressively hollowing out the quality and integrity of case management. When case management weakens, the most vulnerable children facing violence, exploitation, abuse, separation, or recruitment lose the continuity of care and coordinated support necessary to ensure both immediate safety and long-term recovery.





## Impacts on Prevention and Response to Family Separation

While reductions to family separation services are reported across contexts, the impact is particularly pronounced in conflict-affected settings, where 50% of organisations providing family separation services report reductions.

Respondents reported that family tracing and reunification services were delayed or suspended due to funding cuts, leaving separated and unaccompanied children in prolonged uncertain situations. In some contexts, children remained in temporary care arrangements for extended periods without active efforts to trace family members, while cross-border reunification processes were interrupted.

In Somalia, for example, respondents reported reduced capacity for family tracing and follow-up, leaving unaccompanied and separated children in prolonged unsafe arrangements.

Reductions in staffing also limited monitoring of children placed in foster or alternative care. The withdrawal of caseworkers meant that unaccompanied children were no longer regularly assessed or supported, increasing risks for children already in vulnerable situations.



Image Credit: UNICEF/UNI753054/Sánchez

## Impacts on Preventive Child Protection Programming

Across key informant interviews, organisations consistently described a shift in donor prioritisation toward narrowly defined emergency outputs. Interventions perceived as less immediately “lifesaving” are often reduced first, including community-based prevention, parenting support, adolescent programming, and other early intervention approaches that help mitigate harm before it escalates.

Survey findings reflect this pattern. Half of organisations implementing family strengthening interventions report reductions, while 47% report cuts to community-based child protection approaches.

Key informants cautioned that the scaling back of these layered prevention mechanisms weakens early identification and risk mitigation, increasing children’s exposure to exploitation, violence, recruitment, and other protection risks.

These trends suggest that current funding constraints are not only reducing service availability, but also narrowing child protection programming toward acute response functions, with reduced investment in prevention-oriented approaches that sustain safety over time.

## Cross-sectoral Drivers of Child Protection Harms

Survey respondents consistently noted that cuts in other sectors, for example health, education, shelter, nutrition, and food security, are intensifying child protection risks. When families lose access to basic services, children are more likely to be withdrawn from school, pushed into labour, exposed to exploitation, or separated from caregivers.





Respondents described multiple pathways through which reductions in education programming are affecting children, including the closure or reduced hours of temporary learning spaces and schools; the discontinuation of school feeding programmes that incentivised attendance; the withdrawal of education materials, uniforms, and school fee support; and the interruption of tutoring and academic support programmes. In some contexts, teachers left due to unpaid salaries, further reducing access to schooling.

In many cases, children who had only recently returned to school after periods of conflict or displacement were forced out of education again. Respondents highlighted particular impacts on girls, who faced higher risks of dropout and early marriage when education support was withdrawn.

In Kakuma refugee camp, Kenya, reductions in food assistance were reported alongside the downsizing of child protection services, with families describing children going hungry and safe spaces closing, thus increasing stress at the household level and leaving children more exposed to child labour, abuse, and exploitation.

Similarly, in Somalia, the closure of temporary learning spaces and reduced access to basic services has been linked to rising school drop-out and harmful coping mechanisms, including child labour and early marriage, as families struggle to survive without support.

In Gaza, cuts to cash assistance and the collapse of basic services have pushed families toward negative coping strategies, with caregivers reporting children being sent to work or withdrawn from safe spaces to help meet basic needs, which are directly heightening risks of exploitation and long-term harm.

These examples underscore that funding reductions across humanitarian responses are not only shrinking child protection programmes directly, but also accelerating the underlying drivers of harm that those programmes are designed to prevent.



Image Credit: UNICEF/UNI501901/Eyad El Baba





# Impacts on Adherence to the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action

While case management illustrates how quality is deteriorating at the service level, respondents report that the impact extends across the full spectrum of the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action.

Funding cuts are undermining organisations' ability to uphold standards. National NGOs report the highest impact, with 73% indicating significant or very significant effects on their ability to meet Minimum Standards. UN agencies follow closely at 70%, while INGOs, local organisations, and government actors report similarly high levels of strain.



Image Credit: UNICEF/UNI684272/Juan Haro

Key informants describe systemic pressures affecting multiple standards: excessive caseloads, reduced supervision, weakened referral pathways, shrinking access to specialised services, and declining investment in safeguarding, participation, and feedback mechanisms.

These findings indicate that the consequences of funding reductions extend beyond individual interventions. They are affecting compliance with core technical and accountability benchmarks that underpin safe, ethical, and effective child protection programming. In this context, reduced adherence to the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action reflects not isolated implementation challenges, but a broader weakening of the systems designed to ensure children receive quality, rights-based protection.

## Some Minimum Services Continue, but Coverage, Depth, and Quality are Increasingly Compromised

Funding cuts have significantly reduced organisations' ability to meet the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action regardless of the organisational types. **National NGOs are the most affected**, with **73%** reporting significant or very significant impact—mirroring earlier findings that they are experiencing the deepest budget cuts. **UN agencies** follow closely at **70%**, while INGOs, local/CBOs, government, and other organisations cluster around 60%, signaling widespread strain across the system.

Key informants further underscored that maintaining the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action is becoming increasingly difficult due to **excessive caseloads with reduced supervision, weakening referral pathways, shrinking access to specialised services** (including MHPSS, legal support, and alternative care), and **declining resources for safeguarding, accountability, and feedback mechanisms**. Notably, the largest share of respondents reporting very significant impact comes from **UN agencies** and **national NGOs**, highlighting that those responsible for major operational coverage—and those closest to communities—are facing the steepest challenges in sustaining quality programming.





# Impacts on Child Protection Staffing and Technical Capacity

Evidence from the survey shows that staffing capacity, which has been severely negatively impacted by funding cuts, is lowest in exactly the programmatic areas of most concern: case management and MHPSS. These are the core functions already identified as most disrupted. The erosion of staffing and technical depth therefore compounds previously described declines in service quality.

Across organisation types, respondents report substantial disruption to staffing capacity, resulting in fewer personnel, reduced technical oversight, and heavier workloads. National NGOs, INGOs, UN agencies, and local/community-based organisations all report significant strain, while government actors report comparatively lower — though still notable — pressure. Overall, the data indicates a widespread shift toward operating with reduced human resources and diminished technical depth.

## Workload Intensification

Among the different staffing challenges measured, the survey highlights that increased workload is the most consistent severe impact across all organisation types.

- UN agencies: 64% report workload increases “very significantly”
- INGOs: 49%
- National NGOs: 40%
- Local/CBOs: 41%

This reflects not only reduced headcount, but growing expectations placed on remaining staff. As previously described, excessive caseloads and compressed timelines undermine supervision, follow-up, and adherence to the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action.

A respondent from the State of Palestine noted that workload pressures are becoming “increasingly exploitative and unreasonable,” with staff burnout rising as expectations remain unchanged despite shrinking resources.

## Loss of Technical Depth

Similarly, the need for staff to cover multiple roles is reported as highly severe across all organisation types:

- UN agencies: 52% “very significantly”
- INGOs: 46%
- National NGOs: 38%

These findings suggest that staffing cuts are not only reducing headcount but also intensifying pressure on remaining teams, increasing risks of burnout, and reducing overall programme quality.



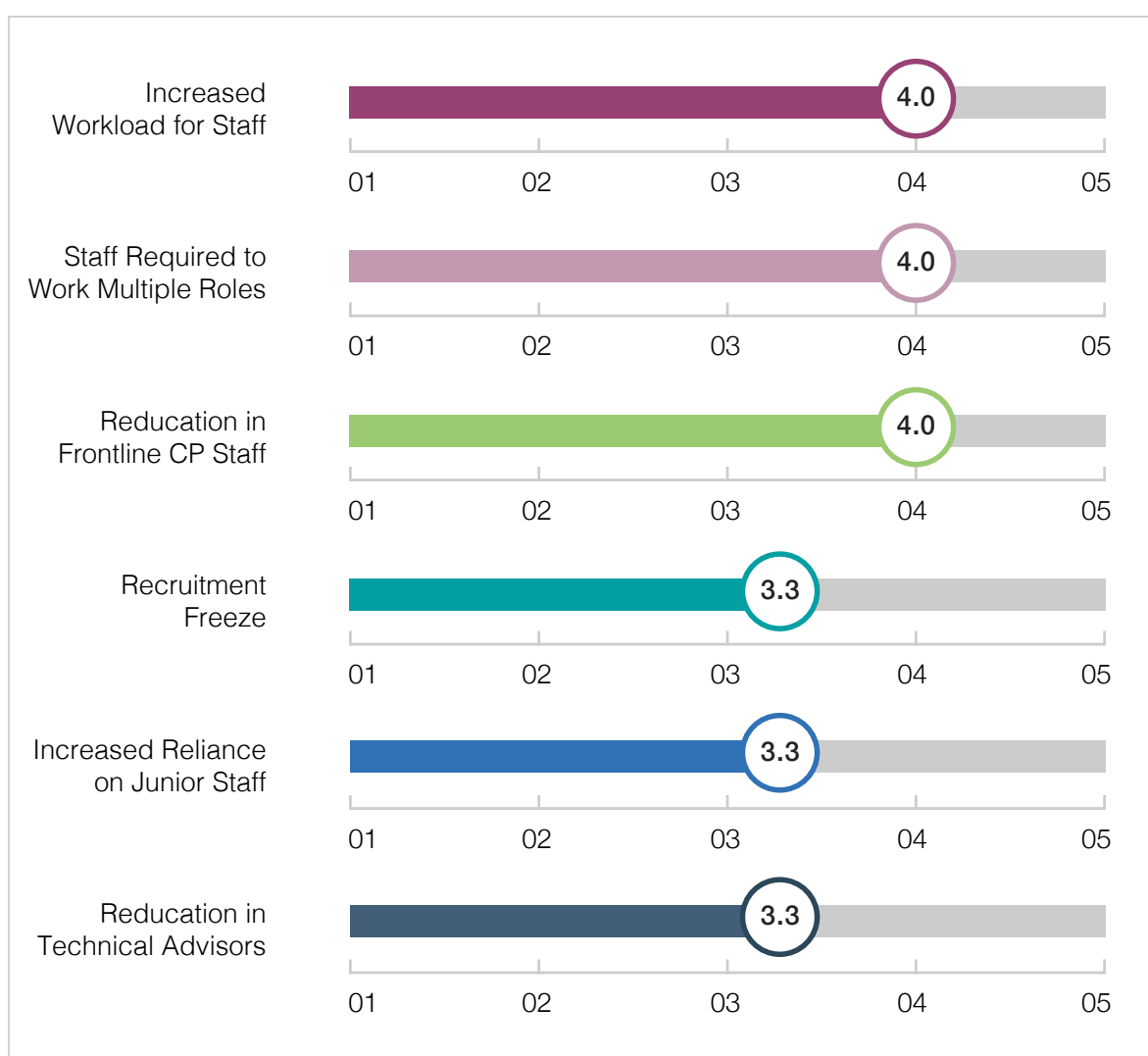


Funding cuts are also directly driving **reductions in frontline staff** and limiting the ability to replace staff.

Key reported impacts include:

- Reductions in frontline staff
- Recruitment freezes
- greater reliance on junior staff
- Reductions in technical adviser positions

Figure 10: Impact of Funding Cuts on Child Protection Staffing (Scale 1-5)



Loss of technical capacity is emerging as a major risk. The reduction in technical advisers is particularly concerning given the complexity of child protection work. UN agencies report high, severe impacts (47% “very significant”), while Local/CBOs report lower impacts (18%), which may partly reflect their smaller initial number of advisers. This points to an erosion of technical leadership and support functions, which are essential for quality assurance, supervision, and monitoring.





Concurrently the survey shows a significant decline in capacity strengthening activities. Among 401 respondents:

- 36.9% report reduced frequency of capacity strengthening activities
- 29.4% report activities cancelled
- 27.7% report reduced quality of activities
- 23.9% report activities moved to online only
- 16.7% report a shift to peer-to-peer learning

**“Budget cuts first led to the half of capacity building considered as non-essential activities, although they are important to ensure quality response...”**

— Respondent from Mali

These results indicate that learning opportunities are being cut at the same time as staffing pressure increases—creating a compounding risk to the quality and sustainability of child protection response.

## Emerging Technical Gaps

Respondents identified clear technical gaps among remaining staff. The most frequently cited was: Case management (34%).

This is particularly concerning because case management is a core child protection function and is essential to identifying and supporting children facing violence, exploitation, neglect, or separation.

The second most frequently cited gaps were:

- MHPSS (24%)
- Child protection mainstreaming (24%)

These findings suggest that the remaining workforce is increasingly lacking specialised skills needed for integrated, high-quality humanitarian response.

Other notable gaps include:

- Community-based approaches (21%)
- Cash and voucher assistance (16%)
- Safe spaces (15%)

Differences emerge by organisation type:

- INGOs report the highest case management gap (38%)
- National NGOs and UN agencies report high MHPSS gaps (29% and 32%)
- Local/CBOs report the highest gap in community-based approaches (31%)





This may reflect differences in programming focus and varying access to technical resources and specialised staff.

However, the increased reliance on community-based child protection mechanisms must be examined alongside reported funding reductions in this very area. Notably, 41% of respondents report funding cuts affecting community-based child protection approaches, while 20% identify community-based approaches as a current technical capacity gap among remaining staff.

This suggests a concerning dynamic: at a time when professional child protection capacity is shrinking and organisations are leaning more heavily on adaptive, community-driven mechanisms to maintain a protective presence, financial resources for those same community-based approaches are being reduced. In parallel, technical capacity to design, supervise, and quality-assure community-based interventions appears to be weakening.

Taken together, these findings may indicate not a strategic shift toward strengthened community-based protection, but rather a constrained adaptation—where organisations increasingly rely on community structures out of necessity, while facing diminishing financial and technical support to implement them effectively. This raises important questions about sustainability, safeguarding standards, and the ability of community-based mechanisms to respond to complex or high-risk cases without adequate professional backing.

### **Qualitative responses reinforce this interpretation.**

“Yes. Even with funding cuts, several adaptive practices and ways of working have emerged to help sustain child protection services, although these approaches often compensate for reduced resources rather than fully replace lost capacity. One key practice has been the increased use of community-based protection mechanisms. Community volunteers, teachers, religious leaders, and parent groups have been informally engaged to identify at-risk children, monitor protection concerns, and facilitate referrals. While not a substitute for professional case management, this approach has helped maintain a basic protective presence in communities when formal staff coverage declined. Simple tools such as referral focal points and community watch systems have been used to prioritise the most urgent cases. Another emerging practice is the integration of child protection services into multi-sectoral programming. Child protection considerations are increasingly embedded within health, education, and livelihood activities, allowing protection concerns to be identified through other service entry points...”

— National NGO Respondent from Yemen

These findings also show alignment with the 2024 [Child Protection in Humanitarian Action Practitioners Survey on Capacity and Learning Needs](#). The current identification of case management as the most significant technical gap (34%) closely mirrors the 2024 survey results, where Case Management/ Best Interests Procedures (57%) ranked among the top five priority intervention areas for training. Similarly, the reported gaps in MHPSS (24%) and child protection mainstreaming (22%) are consistent with the 2024 findings, which identified Mental Health and Psychosocial Distress (67%) and Child Protection Mainstreaming/Integrated Programming (55%) as key capacity priorities. Community-based approaches (21%) also correspond with the strong demand for community-based child protection programming (57%) highlighted in the earlier survey.





Overall, the comparison suggests continuity rather than a shift in sector priorities: the technical areas now identified as gaps among remaining staff are largely the same areas that practitioners previously flagged as priority learning needs. This indicates that capacity strengthening efforts have not kept pace with workforce reductions and evolving demands. In particular, the prominence of case management and MHPSS across both datasets underscores sustained structural weaknesses in core service delivery functions that are essential for integrated, high-quality humanitarian child protection responses.

The survey findings demonstrate that funding cuts are creating a multi-layered crisis for child protection response capacity. Organisations are experiencing **staff reductions, recruitment freezes, loss of technical advisers, and increased workloads**, while at the same time reducing investment in training and capacity strengthening. This is leaving remaining staff overstretched and creating critical gaps in essential competencies such as case management, MHPSS, and mainstreaming.



Image Credit: UNICEF/UNI844153/Pouget





# Humanitarian-System Level Effects: Coordination and Humanitarian Reform

**Background:** As part of the Humanitarian Reset in June 2025, the IASC Principals decided to reduce the eleven clusters to eight and in this context and also agreed that the Protection Cluster should be simplified through the consolidation of its Areas of Responsibilities including the Child Protection Area of Responsibility (CP AoR). The consolidation process has advanced at the global level, with one Protection Cluster coordination team and a consolidated Strategic Advisory Group. Progress at the country-level varies from country to country, with the Global Protection Cluster team tracking and providing support to cluster operations on the implementation of the consolidation actions.

The consolidation of the Protection Cluster and its Areas of Responsibility has taken place in a context of significant financial contraction and wider humanitarian reform. Key informant interviews (KIs) and survey findings identify a range of considerations related to coordination structures, technical support functions, and child protection service delivery.

Survey data indicates that national coordination mechanisms are the second most frequently cited channel for accessing technical support overall (44%), and the most frequently cited source among national NGOs. Respondents described coordination platforms as a source of technical guidance, standards alignment, information-sharing, and capacity strengthening. In Haiti, it was reported that child protection coordination structures are engaged in developing national tools, strengthening coordination capacity, and rolling out coaching and system-strengthening initiatives. KIs also referenced potential implications for service delivery arrangements within consolidated structures. Some respondents raised concerns that changes to coordination architecture could affect decision-making processes and responsiveness to child protection issues. In Niger, respondents noted that reductions in dedicated child protection coordination roles, particularly at sub-national level, may affect follow-up with partners and the provision of technical support. Interviewees referenced potential impacts on the quality and timeliness of specialised services such as case management, family tracing and reunification, and MHPSS in this context.

Advocacy and visibility were also raised in KIs and survey responses. At the country level, respondents observed that strategic and resource allocation decisions are increasingly taken within broader protection and inter-cluster forums. Some stakeholders indicated concern that child protection priorities may receive reduced attention within consolidated structures, particularly in resource-constrained environments where multiple sectors compete for funding. Interviewees described the importance of maintaining clarity regarding child protection standards, risks, and technical priorities within integrated coordination arrangements. Overall, KIs and survey findings reflect a range of perspectives on the consolidation of the CP AoR under the Protection Cluster, including references to potential efficiencies, coordination adjustments,





and considerations related to technical capacity, service delivery support, and representation of child protection priorities within broader protection structures.

## Case Study: Prioritising Child Protection and GBV in Pooled Fund Allocations in South Sudan

During a recent escalation of violence in Bor and other parts of Northern Jonglei State, child protection and GBV actors in South Sudan were able to secure significant pooled fund allocations for child protection and GBV interventions—approximately USD 2.4 million—on average a higher allocation than many other humanitarian sectors.

A key factor was the availability of credible, real-time evidence on protection risks. As the crisis unfolded, UNICEF and the CP AoR, GBV AoR, and Protection Cluster colleagues joined rapid assessments in affected locations, enabling them to document emerging and inter-connected child protection and GBV concerns first-hand. This included evidence of grave violations against children, conflict-related sexual violence, and major gaps in critical protection services.

The findings were rapidly compiled and shared internally within UNICEF, including with the Country Representative, Regional Office, and UNICEF Headquarters, while also informing external discussions with OCHA, the Humanitarian Coordinator, UNMISS, and donors. At the same time, child protection and GBV actors coordinated closely to present a clear and unified protection analysis which was shared with the Protection Cluster.

This combination of timely and credible field evidence, coordinated advocacy, and engagement with decision-makers, as well as close collaboration across child protection and GBV actors and the Protection Cluster, helped ensure responding to and preventing these protection concerns was prioritised in pooled fund allocations.

### Practical Lessons:

- Ensure that child protection and GBV are included in early rapid assessments to capture protection risks that are often missed in the initial inter-agency rapid assessments.
- Produce joint protection analysis quickly, drawing on both child protection and GBV expertise.
- Align analysis, advocacy, and programme proposals to present a coherent protection response.
- Share concise, credible evidence through both internal channels and humanitarian coordination structures.
- Engage early with OCHA, the Humanitarian Coordinator, and donors to ensure protection priorities inform allocation decisions.





# Emerging Practices and Innovations

Amid sustained funding contraction, organisations are adapting their programmatic and operational modalities in order to provide a minimum level of child protection services. Survey responses (186 open-ended submissions) and KIs indicate that while these adaptations cannot compensate for structural funding losses, they have enabled limited continuity of services in some contexts. The emerging practices reflect pragmatism under constraint rather than expansion or transformation.

**Strengthening community-based mechanisms** is the most frequently cited adaptation. Nearly one-third of respondents described increased reliance on community volunteers, revitalised Community-Based Child Protection Committees, and engagement of trusted local actors such as teachers, religious leaders, women's groups, and youth networks. These actors are being supported to identify at-risk children, provide basic psychosocial first aid, conduct awareness-raising, and facilitate referrals. While not a substitute for professional case management, these approaches help maintain early warning and basic protective presence, particularly in hard-to-reach areas where formal staffing has declined.

A second major trend is the expanded use of **remote and digital tools**. Organisations are using phone-based case follow-ups, WhatsApp coordination groups, SMS reporting systems, virtual supervision, digital helplines, and mobile case-tracking applications to sustain contact with children and families while reducing travel and operational costs. KIs noted that such tools are particularly useful for lower-risk cases and remote supervision; however, they are not appropriate for high-risk situations requiring in-person intervention.

**Partnerships and collaborative models** are also being strengthened. Respondents described pooling resources across agencies, forming consortia, harmonising referral pathways, and coordinating outreach to avoid duplication and prevent complete service gaps. Collaboration with faith-based organisations, local NGOs, and community groups has helped maintain limited coverage in contexts where individual agencies could no longer operate independently. In some cases, consortium arrangements and donor diversification have partially bridged service gaps.

At programme level, organisations are increasingly adopting **integration and mainstreaming strategies**, embedding child protection identification and referrals within education, health, nutrition, WASH, food security, GBV, and cash programming. Training frontline workers in these sectors to recognise protection risks creates multiple entry points for identifying vulnerable children, particularly where dedicated child protection funding has contracted. KIs noted that this has helped preserve some protective functions, though it depends on sustained technical oversight.

A parallel shift toward **localisation** is evident. Implementation responsibility is increasingly transferred to national NGOs and community-based organisations, with international actors focusing on technical support and quality assurance. Respondents highlighted the lower operational costs, stronger community acceptance, and sustained presence of local actors as advantages. However, they also emphasised the need for continued technical mentoring and predictable resources to safeguard quality and ensure a responsible transfer of power.

Under resource pressure, organisations have adopted more deliberate **prioritisation and triage approaches**, concentrating intensive case management on the highest-risk children—such as unaccompanied and separated children, survivors of violence, or those at risk of recruitment or early marriage—while lighter-touch follow-up is maintained through community mechanisms.





Simplified tools, group-based psychosocial support, task-shifting to trained non-specialists, and the use of existing community infrastructure are being used to maximise limited capacity.

Some agencies are also linking **economic strengthening and cash assistance** more closely to protection outcomes, recognising that addressing household economic stress can reduce drivers of child labour, early marriage, and violence. While not universally feasible, such approaches have helped stabilise some families and mitigate risk escalation.

Across KIs, there was strong caution against over-optimism. Adaptations have enabled limited continuity of services in some contexts, particularly through community engagement, integration, and remote modalities. However, these measures largely compensate for loss rather than expand protection capacity.

Crucially, they cannot replace sustained investment in specialised case management, supervised technical leadership, structured prevention programming, and functioning referral ecosystems. Without renewed financing for both frontline delivery and capacity strengthening — particularly for national and community-based actors — adaptive practices risk becoming coping mechanisms within a progressively weakened protection system rather than building blocks of resilience.

## Key Recommendations

The findings of this report indicate that sustained financial contraction is contributing to reduced coverage of child protection services, pressure on service quality, and increased harms. Addressing these trends will require coordinated action across **donors, governments, implementing partners, and coordination bodies involved in child protection.**

### 1. Stabilise and Protect Child Protection Financing

**For donors, governments, and pooled funding mechanisms:**

- Avoid disproportionate reductions to child protection within humanitarian portfolios.
- Ensure child protection is prioritised as essential and lifesaving within resource prioritisation decisions and funding allocations, including pooled funds.
- Where overall budgets are constrained, provide longer-term and more predictable funding cycles to support responsible planning, child protection workforce continuity, and strategic adjustment of geographic coverage.
- When exiting partnerships or reducing portfolios, support responsible transition processes, including bridge funding, diversification support, and advance notice to partners.
- Ensure that child protection funding supports both frontline service delivery and the technical functions (supervision, safeguarding, coordination, and capacity strengthening) required to maintain quality by adhering to the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action.

While increased investment remains the most direct way to address current pressures, **predictability and stability of funding are also critical to maintaining the continuity of child protection services.**





## 2. Protect Quality and Technical Capacity as Core Protection Functions

### For donors, governments, and implementing agencies:

Evidence from the survey suggests that funding reductions are affecting both the coverage and the quality of services, including increased caseloads, reduced supervision, and the loss of technical advisory capacity and thus, overall pose significant barriers to meeting the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action.

- Protect funding for supervision, safeguarding, and technical advisory functions, even under budget constraints.
- Avoid cutting capacity strengthening and workforce development in order to support adherence to the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action and avoid doing harm.
- Invest in adaptive, locally anchored models of technical support, including national or regional mentoring hubs, peer supervision networks, and strengthened national technical fora.
- Maintain structured quality assurance and accountability mechanisms, even where programming is scaled back.

Sustaining these functions is important to ensure that services remain safe, effective, and aligned with the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action.

## 3. Support National, Local, and Community-Based Actors

### For donors, governments, and international implementing agencies:

Survey responses indicate that national NGOs and local and community-based organisations are experiencing some of the most severe funding reductions to their child protection budgets, despite being closest to affected communities and their central role in delivering services.

- Prioritise direct and predictable funding for national and local actors.
- Protect community-based child protection approaches from disproportionate cuts, recognising their role in prevention, early identification of risks, and community engagement.
- Ensure that localisation commitments are accompanied by sustained technical support, partnership investment, and engagement in coordination mechanisms.


Strengthening the sustainability of national, local, and community-based structures is critical to maintaining continuity of child protection services.

## 4. Support Strategic Prioritisation and Adaptation of Services

### For donors, governments, implementing partners, and coordination bodies:

As organisations adjust programmes in response to funding reductions, structured prioritisation processes can help ensure that limited resources are used to sustain the most critical services.



- 
- Undertake transparent prioritisation processes grounded in risk analysis and aligned with the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action.
  - Maintain a balance between response services and preventive approaches, recognising the role prevention plays in reducing longer-term protection harms.
  - Align programme adjustments with available workforce capacity and realistic financing to support sustainable service delivery.
  - Use coordination mechanisms to support collective prioritisation and information sharing on service availability and coverage.

Strategic prioritisation can help protect core components of child protection systems while organisations navigate resource constraints.

## Concluding Note

The findings of this report point clearly to sustained financial contraction as the central driver of declining access, quality, and technical capacity in humanitarian child protection. While efficiency and adaptation are necessary, there is no substitute for adequate, predictable investment.

Without corrective action, children will continue to bear the consequences of a system increasingly unable to prevent harm, respond to violations, and uphold the standards designed to safeguard children's safety, dignity, and recovery.

[Additional infographics can be found here.](#)