Primary Prevention Framework
For Child Protection in Humanitarian Action
Summary Version
This summary version provides an overview of the main concepts in the Framework. Please visit the Prevention Initiative webpage of the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action for the full version.

The Primary Prevention Framework for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (the Framework) provides guidance for humanitarian workers on the key actions and considerations to apply when developing or implementing programming to prevent harm to children in humanitarian settings at the population-level.

1.0. THE IMPORTANCE OF PRIMARY PREVENTION

Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (CPHA) is “the prevention of and response to abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence against children in humanitarian action.” While significant effort and improvements have been made in the sector on responding when harm has already taken place, less focus has been placed on how we can prevent harm to children before it occurs. Investment in primary prevention is essential to ensuring accountability to children and the centrality of protection within humanitarian preparedness and response efforts.

Primary prevention is critical in humanitarian settings for three main reasons:

- An ethical responsibility to prevent harm to children before it occurs whenever possible by all humanitarians;
- Improving the sustainability and long-term impact of humanitarian responses; and
- Increased cost-effectiveness of child protection interventions.

Prevention and response programming work together. Prevention approaches may reduce, but will never eliminate, the need for effective response services. Primary prevention and response programming are integrated and both essential components of child protection systems. Interventions to strengthen child protection systems -- such as building workforce capacities, increasing awareness on child developmental needs, or investing more in the social service workforce -- will support both prevention and response approaches.

2.0. A PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH TO PREVENTION

In accordance with the public health model of prevention, there are three levels of prevention: primary, secondary and tertiary. Primary prevention is about identifying and addressing trends or patterns of risk within the population, as opposed to identifying individual cases for service provision. The definitions for each level of prevention as stated in the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (CPMS) are provided below.
This Framework focuses on primary prevention. Primary prevention addresses the root causes of harm to children within a population or community, leading to an overall reduction in the number of families and children in need of secondary and tertiary prevention services and response services. Investment in primary prevention is essential to ensuring accountability to children and the centrality of protection within humanitarian preparedness and response efforts.

3.0. KEY TERMS FOR PRIMARY PREVENTION PROGRAMMING

Understanding the root causes of harm to children and protective factors that mitigate harm within a context is the foundation of primary prevention efforts.

- Risk factors are threats in a child’s environment and vulnerabilities that increase the probability of harmful outcomes for children. These include root causes of harm to children.
- Protective factors reduce the probability of a harmful outcome and support well-being.
Harmful outcomes for children refer to dangers and injuries, physical and emotional maltreatment, sexual and gender-based violence, mental health and psychosocial distress, association with armed forces or armed groups, child labor or family separation.

**What does population-level in primary prevention mean?**

Primary prevention aims to reduce the risk of harm for all children within a population or a subgroup of the population. A population can refer to a whole society or a part of it. For example, a subgroup of the whole society could be a geographic community and include all the children within that community. It can also refer to a sub-group of children within the broader society. For example, all children living in refugee camps within a country, or all children aged one to five years old in the broader society.

### 4.0. PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE CPHA PREVENTION INTERVENTIONS

Eight principles for effective primary prevention interventions have been identified based on existing evidence. These principles are to be applied at all steps of the Framework.
5.0. THE FIVE STEPS OF PREVENTION PROGRAMMING

An overview of the key actions for primary prevention interventions during the program cycle is provided below. This is followed by further details on actions to take for each step covered in the full Framework document.

Key Steps for Primary Prevention in the Program Management Cycle

1. **Preparedness**
   - 1. Understand and document risk and protective factors related to the types of harm that children experience now and those they may experience during a potential crisis.
   - 2. Include actions to address risk and protective factors in multi-sectoral preparedness plans.
   - 3. Advocate for and invest in primary prevention actions pre-crisis.
   - 4. Take early action to prevent harm at the beginning of a crisis.

2. **Needs assessment and situation analysis**
   - 1. Gather existing information from multi-sector sources on harmful outcomes to children in context.
   - 2. Support community-led analysis of the risk and protective factors associated with harmful outcomes.
   - 3. Determine if any sub-population groups may be prioritized in prevention efforts.

3. **Design and planning**
   - 1. Develop a contextualized theory of change to prevent harm based on the identified risk and protective factors.
   - 2. Design population-level approaches at multiple levels of the socio-ecology.
   - 3. Design and plan interventions with communities, and include children and their families.

4. **Implementation and monitoring**
   - 1. Monitor changes in risk and protective factors during implementation.
   - 2. Adapt prevention interventions based on monitoring data.

5. **Evaluation and learning**
   - 1. Evaluate changes in result outcomes at the level of risk and protective factors.
   - 2. Evaluate the prevention of harmful outcomes.
The Primary Prevention Framework for CPHA provides further details on actions to take when developing and implementing prevention programming at each step of the program management cycle. The document also provides several programmatic examples and further discussion on:

- Undertaking primary prevention efforts in both short and long-term funding cycles;
- Addressing social norms and behavior change in humanitarian settings when social norms are identified as risk factors associated with harmful outcomes for children; and
- Measuring prevention outcomes in humanitarian settings, including links to tools to identify and prioritize risk and protective factors as well as suggested monitoring and evaluation methodologies.

ENDNOTES


