



# PROTECTION AND ASSISTANCE OF UNACCOMPANIED AND SEPARATED CHILDREN

**Armenia Red Cross**

**CASE STUDY**

Photo description: Hands of children participating in Armenia Red Cross project for children  
Photo credit: Armenia Red Cross

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Photo description: Children participating in protection programming for children.  
Photo credit: Armenia Red Cross

## Background

The Armenian Red Cross Society (ARCS) provides support for protection for refugee and displaced children, ensuring that they feel safe, live with dignity, and have the opportunity to make choices. The ARCS, in collaboration with UNHCR, UNICEF, and several other organizations working in the field of child protection, is actively working to create favorable conditions for the realization of all children's rights. This includes ensuring equal rights and opportunities for children in various sectors of public life.

Since 2017, the ARCS has been handling child protection cases. The child protection cases managed by the ARCS's programs have been diverse and include:

- Children separated from their families
- Unaccompanied children
- Children left without parental care
- Children subjected to violence
- Children with disabilities (mental, physical)
- Children without proper documentation
- Children excluded from education
- Children with health issues
- Children in need of psychological support, as well as other specific cases.

### **Documentation Process:**

For each case, an individual file is maintained, which includes the following relevant information:

- Case identification;
- Intervention, Best Interest Assessments, Best Interest Determinations;
- Referral;
- Ongoing monitoring/feedback; and
- Case closure.

Child protection case managers of the ARCS organize individual case discussions with involved partners for urgent cases.

Within the framework of the program, children involved have been asylum seekers, refugees or individuals in refugee-like situations, internally displaced persons, or stateless individuals.

### **Who was Supported and How**

The services of the ARCS's child protection programs are aimed at children up to the age of 18 years who belong to groups in vulnerable situations, such as asylum seekers, refugees, or those who are internally displaced. They are considered especially vulnerable if they are unaccompanied or separated from their families.

### **Results since 2017:**

- Children who have received individual case management: 2,920 children (1,485 male, 1,435 female).
- Children, adolescents, and caregivers accessing community-based MHPSS (Mental Health and Psychosocial Support): 4,475 children (2,151 male, 2,324 female).
- Unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) provided with alternative care and/or reunified: From September 24–30, 2023, ARCS identified and referred 14 separated/unaccompanied children to state care centers.
- Referrals to other services available at ARCS: 854 cases.

### **Cases of Unaccompanied and Separated Children:**

In the context of migration, unaccompanied and separated children are particularly vulnerable. The child protection case managers of the ARCS have practically managed numerous cases of unaccompanied and separated children, prioritizing the best interests of the child in all cases, ensuring their protection, assessment, and careful consideration, while involving all relevant parties.

The management of cases involving unaccompanied and separated children follows the subsequent steps and appropriate guidance:

- Appointment of a representative within the asylum procedure framework, after which immediate referral is made to the Guardianship and Trusteeship Body.
- Provision of legal and psychological support, and referral to the appropriate service-providing NGO or state institution in cases of interviews or other necessary situations.

- Referral to the Guardianship and Trusteeship Body for the appointment of a guardian, trustee, or legal representative.
- Referrals for social, psychological, healthcare, professional guidance, and legal support based on the assessed needs of the child in a difficult situation, to ensure access to appropriate services.
- Referrals to relevant NGOs or state institutions (local polyclinics, centers providing professional support, educational institutions, etc.).
- Referrals for the care, education, and socio-psychological recovery of a child in a difficult situation to appropriate day centers or educational institutions.
- Referrals to specialized services or organizations providing specific expertise.
- Referrals for long-term solutions for unaccompanied and separated children (placement in crisis centers, foster or guardian families, family reunification, etc.).

## Successes

As a result of the cooperation between the ARCS and its partners, a standard operational procedure for child protection case management has been developed. During the provision of services, child protection case managers have adhered to the ARCS's policy on the protection of children's rights. All child protection cases identified by the ARCS have been managed in accordance with the standard operational procedures for child protection.

Under the coordination of the ARCS, meetings of the working group focused on the management of protection cases for displaced and refugee children have been organized. These meetings were held with the active participation of representatives from partner organizations, where not only specific and complex cases were discussed, but also systemic issues were addressed.

The child protection case managers of the ARCS carefully balance all factors in finding long-term solutions for unaccompanied and separated children, including:

- Arranging temporary care
- Exploring the possibility of family reunification
- Separation from guardian parents or accompanying adults in cases of exploitation, abuse, trafficking, or other risks.

In implementing each of these actions, the principle of the child's best interests is properly considered.

The process of documenting information has been provided with sufficient time and resources to ensure the child's specific needs are met. Additionally, various other factors are considered, including the child's origin, gender, religion, and cultural characteristics.

In cases of unaccompanied and separated children, after the appointment of a guardian/legal representative, regular supervision and monitoring of the actions of guardians/legal representatives have been carried out to ensure they fully fulfill their duties.

The ARCS has conducted a series of training sessions aimed at raising awareness on child protection.

- Training sessions have been held for new staff, field workers, and volunteers, focusing on data protection and legal and ethical considerations when interacting with children.
- Staff and volunteers of the ARCS have been informed about the organization's child protection policy.
- Child protection capacity-building training has also been provided for representatives of partner organizations.
- Informative meetings have been organized to develop and improve parenting skills.

## Challenges and Difficulties

- In cases of unaccompanied and separated children, a challenge is the deadlines set by the commissions after applying to the Guardianship and Trusteeship Body, as well as unnecessary delays in meetings.
- In the case of refugees or displaced children of non-Armenian ethnicity, the lack of interpreters poses a significant issue.
- For refugees or displaced children of non-Armenian ethnicity, language barriers are an obstacle:
  - » Communication with peers,
  - » Difficulties in the educational process in schools,
  - » Challenges in accessing other support services and social inclusion.
- In the case of unaccompanied and separated refugees or displaced children of non-Armenian ethnicity, foster families may have linguistic, religious, and cultural differences, which can lead to misunderstandings. This issue is often mutual, affecting both the child and the foster caregiver relationship. For children, these differences in characteristics may present new challenges and, in many cases, may conflict with their existing beliefs.
- When unaccompanied and separated children are temporarily accommodated in special shelters or crisis centers, there may be dissatisfaction with living conditions.

The specialists of the ARCS dedicate all possible efforts and resources to the protection of children's rights, strengthening mechanisms, creating favourable conditions, and ensuring the proper provision of services for children in difficult situations and their families.

To overcome the above-mentioned challenges, the ARCS collaborates in the field of child protection with the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Internal Affairs' Migration and Citizenship Service, the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports, regional authorities, and territorial centres, as well as with international, civil society, and other active organizations in the sector participation.

## Lessons Learned

The experience of ARCS has led to numerous lessons being learned.

- Effective partnerships in the field of child protection enhance the ability to overcome challenges.
- The quality of services can always be improved, especially in terms of enhancing management skills during crisis and emergency situations.
- Standard operational procedures and the implementation of children's rights protection policies are crucial for the successful implementation of programs.
- Early detection of cases and addressing case management issues, along with preventing unnecessary delays in finding solutions and strengthening cooperation with various authorities, are essential for the effective implementation of programs.
- Continuous training and capacity building for staff and volunteers are necessary to maintain the quality of services.
- It is essential for staff and volunteers to be familiar with the minimum standards of protection, gender, and inclusion, as these are required in the planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation phases of programs, ensuring the involvement of protection, gender, and inclusive community participation. It is essential for staff and volunteers to be familiar with the minimum standards of protection, (CHS), and managing complaints mechanisms.