

PROTECTION AND ASSISTANCE OF UNACCOMPANIED AND SEPARATED CHILDREN

GUIDANCE FOR
NATIONAL SOCIETIES

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Cover photo: Uganda Red Cross youth volunteer counsels an unaccompanied child at a collection point a few kilometres from the Uganda South Sudan border. Photo credit: IFRC

Authors: Audrey Oettli and Gurvinder Singh

Design by: Fiona Cheng

Contact us

Requests for commercial reproduction should be directed to the IFRC Secretariat:

IFRC Secretariat Address: Chemin des Crêts 17 Petit-Saconnex, 1209 Geneva, Switzerland

Postal address: P.O. Box 303, 1211 Geneva 19, Switzerland

T +41 (0)22 730 42 22 | **F** +41 (0)22 730 42 00 | **E** secretariat@ifrc.org | **W** ifrc.org

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*Tanzania Red Cross Manager for Restoring Family Links
in the Nyagurusu refugee camp experiencing an influx of
migrants from Burundi. Photo credit: IFRC*



TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	3
ABOUT THIS GUIDANCE DOCUMENT	6
INTRODUCTION	7
National Society Preparedness	9
Child Safeguarding Systems	11
Actions For Prevention	16
Assessing the Overall Needs and Capacities of UASC	19
Conducting a Protection, Gender, and Inclusion Analysis	20
Engaging and Empowering UASC	23
Delivering Essential Services	25
Humanitarian Diplomacy on Issues Related to UASC	33
ADDITIONAL MOVEMENT RESOURCES	36
GLOSSARY	37

ABOUT THIS GUIDANCE DOCUMENT

This Guidance Document is designed to support National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in enhancing their ability to assist and protect children at risk, in particular Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC) through programming that reflect each National Society's own capacity, interests, and experience in line with internationally agreed standards on Child Protection and within the framework of the **Convention on the Rights of the Child**.

The Guidance Document also aligns with the **IFRC Secretariat Policy on Child Safeguarding** that is supported by inter-agency minimum standards such as the **Core Humanitarian Standards**, the **Child Protection Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Action**, and the **Interagency Network for Education in Emergencies Minimum Standards**. This also supports the implement of the **IFRC PGI Policy** and the **IFRC Strategic Framework on Education 2020-2030**.

When Can This Guidance Document Be Used

This Guidance Document can be used in any phase or type of National Society programming involving UASC. For instance, it can be used as part of National Society development, emergency preparedness, emergency response, Humanitarian Diplomacy, etc.

Who Is This Guidance Document For

This Guidance Document is designed for anyone in a National Society who is assessing, designing, implementing, or monitoring and evaluating programming that involves UASC.

How To Use This Guidance Document

The Guidance Document is structured so that National Societies can use the sections that are most relevant to them. Some sections are relevant to all National Societies working with UASC, such as those for National Society preparedness, child safeguarding systems, actions for prevention, assessing needs, empowering and engaging UASC. Other sections like those on essential services and humanitarian diplomacy might have some parts more relevant than others depending on the context and focus each National Society is taking.

What Standards Need to Be Considered When Using This Guidance Document

The **IFRC Minimum Standards for Protection, Gender, and Inclusion (PGI)** are a foundation for programming in emergencies, including with UASC.

A key part of the Minimum Standards for PGI is to always consider the role of gender. When using this Guidance Document, consider that while all children have the same rights, not all children always have access to these rights because of their gender. Specifically, children of different genders can be treated differently and have different access to power in making decisions and how they are treated. In addition, children's sexual orientation and gender identity can influence how they perceive safety and access to support services and this can change at different ages of childhood. As such, applying a gender lens improves the quality, relevance, and impact of interventions with UASC.

The Minimum Standards for PGI draw on and complement the **Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action**. When working to protect or assist UASC, this includes specific standard 13: Unaccompanied and Separated Children.

INTRODUCTION

National Societies around the world work to protect and assist UASC. For many National Societies this is a part of their ongoing programs in emergencies such as disasters, conflicts, and migration. This work by National Societies reflects the reality that Red Cross and Red Crescent personnel around the world encounter children (any person under the age of 18 years) who are unaccompanied or separated from their families. Actions by National Societies vary by location and context, yet often include a focus on one or more of the following areas: protection referrals, Mental Health and Psychosocial Support, support to go to school and learn new skills, Restoring Family Links, managing reception facilities, guardianship, and long-term care.

These children have left their usual place of residence and are either in the process of travelling to or have arrived at a new destination, or may be returning home after travelling. This journey may be for various reasons, and may be voluntary or involuntary, within their own country or across borders.¹ While some children travel with their parents or caregivers—adults responsible for their care by legal mandate or community acceptance—others are separated or unaccompanied. It is important to recognize that even children traveling with their parents or caregivers are not always safe. Some children are at risk of harm from their own caregivers or may face situations where their caregivers are unable to protect them from others.²

Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC) are those who have lost contact with their families due to conflict, disaster, migration and displacement, or socio-economic reasons, are among the most vulnerable of those affected by such situations.³ They need **protection** from heightened risks of violence, abuse, exploitation, and neglect.⁴ They need adapted and appropriate **assistance** to overcome significant barriers to access essential needs and other forms of vital support. They also lose critical months or years in school, and are deprived of the opportunity of growing and developing in a normal, supportive and conducive environment.

In addition to physical protection and assistance needs, UASC have urgent mental health and psychosocial support needs. Experiences of separation, being inappropriately treated as adults due to age-disputes, trauma, instability, and uncertainty can lead to profound emotional distress, which, if unaddressed, may hinder their ability to recover, form relationships, engage in learning, and develop positively. Providing timely and appropriate mental health and psychosocial support is critical to safeguarding their right to survival and development, as recognized under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and supported by evidence linking psychosocial well-being to long-term developmental outcomes.⁵

Globally, there is a lack of comprehensive data on UASC as many remain uncounted and unseen, missing from data collection and analysis efforts.⁶ However estimates indicate that their numbers are substantial, for example,⁷ UNHCR reports approximately 218,000 UASC worldwide.⁸

1 Caring for Children Moving Alone: Protecting Unaccompanied and Separated Children MOOC, <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/caring-for-children-moving-alone>

2 Caring for Children Moving Alone: Protecting Unaccompanied and Separated Children MOOC, <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/caring-for-children-moving-alone>

3 A note on terminology: IFRC prefers the term “children” to “minors” as a more humane term and because “minor” is an administrative and legal term. In a world where migrants are dehumanized, referring to children as “minors” rather than as “children” has potentially negative connotations and risks their exclusion from the child rights and child protection frameworks. [Migration-Displacement-AP-Key-Terms-Glossary.pdf](#)

4 The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. (2012). Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (2019 edition). <https://alliancecpha.org/en/cpms>.

5 IASC (2007). *Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings*.
UNICEF (2017). *Guidance: Psychosocial Support for Children in Humanitarian Settings*.
WHO & UNHCR (2015). *mhGAP Humanitarian Intervention Guide (mhGAP-HIG)*.
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), in particular Articles 6, 19, 24, and 39.

6 IDAC Data InSIGHT # 1, **The urgent need for better data to protect children on the move**, (2021).

7 International Data Alliance for Children on the Move, *Children on the Move: Key terms, definitions and concepts*, United Nations Children's Fund, New York, 2023.

8 UNHCR. 2024. **Global Report 2024 | UNHCR**

There is a significant gap in understanding the full scope of this issue, including details around children's destinations, reasons for travel (including armed conflict and situations of violence), age, points of origin, and countries of transit.⁹ There is also a lack of critical information about the age, sex and disability status of UASC and how these elements intersect, whether they travel with family or alone, their conditions along the way, and their specific vulnerabilities.¹⁰

Incomplete and inaccurate data often result from inconsistent reporting practices. Some children are systematically recorded, such as those crossing official borders, while others remain largely unrecorded, especially if they avoid official identification, lack documentation, or move within their own country for work or other reasons.

The specific gender-based needs of UASC are not always analysed or understood and therefore, action can be gender-blind and reinforce risks for girls, boys and non-binary children. For example, without understanding the specific barriers to participation due to cultural norms, risks to Sexual and Gender-based Violence (SGBV), or the need to access appropriate menstrual hygiene products can all limit the safety of girls who are alone. Conversely, where the social drivers leading boys to migrate alone, the barriers they may have to reporting SGBV, or the challenges around accessing mental health support because of cultural norms are not understood it can diminish the impact of interventions for boys. Moreover, when data does not include non-binary children, their needs can be missed and services that are appropriate for them diminished.

Whether they are internally displaced, migrants, or refugees, UASC are first and foremost children. They possess the same rights to survival, protection, development, and participation as those who have not crossed borders. They have the same needs and rights to good health, adequate nutrition, responsive caregiving, safety, mental health and psychosocial support, and opportunities for learning and recreation.



IFRC Ocean Viking team rescues people from a rubber boat in distress in Maltese SRR. Of the 156 survivors 68 were Unaccompanied and Separated Children. Photo credit: IFRC

⁹ Caring for Children Moving Alone: Protecting Unaccompanied and Separated Children MOOC, <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/caring-for-children-moving-alone>

¹⁰ Protecting children on the move starts with better data, <https://data.unicef.org/resources/call-action-protecting-children-move-starts-better-data/>.

National Society Preparedness

Why Internal Preparedness Is Important

Working with UASC can be challenging and complex. In order for a National Society to be prepared and to safely and effectively implement child protection services, it is a good practice to start with an internal assessment. This is best when linked to existing processes like the **IFRC Preparedness for Effective Response (PER)**.

An internal assessment, especially when linked to PER, can help a National Society clarify and strengthen its approach by examining what role the National Society is best positioned to take, building a practical plan, ensuring the principle of “do no harm” is achieved, and taking sustainable action that is linked to the other sectors and capacities of the National Society.

How Internal Preparedness Can Be Supported

Conducting an internal assessment can require perspectives from a variety of programming areas within a National Society, from other components of the Movement — IFRC, ICRC and other National Societies — as well as from external partners such as governments and non-governmental organizations.

One way to gather feedback from different perspectives is to organize an inter-departmental feedback session. This can include National Society leadership and operational and technical personnel from all relevant programme areas. In addition, consultations can be conducted with external partners, who can be included in relevant inter-departmental discussions.

Questions to Help a National Society Prepare to Take Action

The questions for an internal assessment can be divided into the following parts: defining a role for the National Society, building a plan of action, doing no harm, and sustaining action. Any actions to support UASC need to ensure respect for the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, following the Movement’s approach to protection of being “driven by needs and informed by rights” and embracing the “do no harm” principle of humanitarian assistance.¹¹ Crucially, whenever a UASC is in distress, a child-centered and supportive approach must be prioritized.

✓	Defining a role
	1. What previous experience does the National Society have in working with UASC?
	2. Why is the National Society choosing to work with UASC? Are there needs for UASC it has identified that need to be addressed?
	3. How has the leadership of the National Society signalled its support to work with UASC?
	4. How have the needs of UASC been determined? How have the age, gender, disability and other diversity-specific needs of girls and boys been addressed? Have the special needs of children with disabilities been assessed by trained professionals?
	5. How has the National Society role been determined? Has an assessment been conducted or is one planned?
	6. Has the National Society had a dialogue with local government and other humanitarian agencies about its role in supporting UASC? How does the National Society role complement existing work by the government, legal requirements, or action by other humanitarian agencies?
	7. Does the National Society have existing capacities it can build on in terms of trained human resources, policies, and structures to support UASC?

¹¹ As set out in the Movement Protection Framework (and resolution): <https://pgi.ifrc.org/protection-movement>

✓	Building a plan of action
	8. What funding is available to support interventions with UASC? Are the existing funds sufficient? Are the funds sustainable?
	9. Are there existing National Society programmes that can be drawn upon (e.g., Disaster Management, Migration, Health, Mental Health and Psychosocial Support, Restoring Family Links, Youth, Education, Humanitarian Diplomacy)?
	10. What lessons learned from past National Society or external projects can be drawn upon in the design and implementation of the new project?
	11. Are there clear objectives for the planned interventions? If so, what are the specific outcomes/ outputs, and is a theory of change included? Are the objectives based on needs identified in an assessment?
	12. How will support to UASC be managed considering the other priorities of the National Society (i.e., is there a focal point, are there dedicated resources)?
	13. How will children's perspectives be included throughout the project?
	14. What challenges are anticipated? How will these be managed or overcome?
✓	Doing no harm
	15. Does the National Society have a Child Safeguarding Policy that outlines the roles and responsibilities of all personnel on how to prevent and respond to violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation against girls and boys? Are all personnel who work with UASC required to sign it and be briefed on it?
	16. What steps will be taken to screen all staff and volunteers who interact with UASC?
	17. What are the security risks children might be exposed to? What mitigation measures are in place to address them?
	18. Are there any security risks for National Society volunteers and staff who implement the project?
	19. Have referral pathways for any concerns of physical, sexual or psychological violence against children, or for specialized mental health and psychosocial support been mapped out and made available to UASC in an appropriate and child-centred manner? Have volunteers and staff been provided access and briefed on the referral pathways?
	20. How will the capacity and quality of work of staff and volunteers be assessed? What is the training plan for staff and volunteers who will work with UASC?
	21. What systems exist to provide UASC with opportunities to provide feedback or make complaints about the services they receive?
✓	Sustaining action
	22. How long is the project with UASC planned to last? What analysis is the timeline based on?
	23. What are the key actions that can be taken to ensure that activities with UASC remain sustainable for the duration they are required?

Child Safeguarding Systems

It is a priority that National Societies ensure that *child safeguarding* systems are in place. *Child safeguarding* refers to the responsibility of National Societies to make sure their staff, operations, and programmes do no harm to children. It includes policy, procedures and practices to prevent children from being harmed by anyone working for the National Society as well as steps to respond and investigate when harm occurs, including an obligation to act on all concerns, disclosures, or suspicions of violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation against children.

Child safeguarding is distinct from but complements *Child Protection* – this refers to the prevention and response to violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation against children, in partnership with and in support of local communities and authorities.

Child Participation is an essential enabling factor which supports both Child Safeguarding and Child Protection work, and indeed should be integrated into all programmes, operations, and procedures to ensure that: a) children’s diverse needs are effectively met and to b) keep children safe from harm.

Comparison of child protection, child safeguarding, and child participation

	CHILD PROTECTION “Supporting communities to protect children”	CHILD SAFEGUARDING “Making our own organisation safe”	CHILD PARTICIPATION¹² “Ensuring children have a voice and agency in decisions that affect them”
Core Aim	Prevent and respond to violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation against children by anyone including caregivers, state actors, and armed groups	Prevent and respond to violence, abuse, neglect, or exploitation by anyone representing, partnering with, supplying, or contracting with a National Society	The informed, willing, and meaningful involvement of children in matters that affect them in a community or in an organisation
National Society / Organisation’s Responsibility	Choose to partner with and support local communities and authorities to develop and implement programmes that prevent and respond to violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation against children. For example, protection and assistance to UASC	Required to ensure the National Society / organisation has in place systems that are accountable for staff, volunteers, partners, suppliers, and contractors and operations and programmes that do not cause violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation to children	Aim to design and develop programmes which facilitate the meaningful participation and empowerment of children
Relevant Laws	National laws for the protection of children International laws, conventions, and treaties signed by national governments	National laws for the protection of children Organisational policies	International conventions and organizational policies
Responsibilities	Responsibility of local authorities to protect children; National Societies a support	Responsibility of National Society to ensure the children it interacts with are safe	Responsibility of National Societies to create opportunities for meaningful participation

12 For more on child participation, see the section on Engaging and Empowering UASC.

	CHILD PROTECTION "Supporting communities to protect children"	CHILD SAFEGUARDING "Making our own organisation safe"	CHILD PARTICIPATION¹² "Ensuring children have a voice and agency in decisions that affect them"
Sample Approaches	Community-based approaches for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support, Education, Restoring Family Links, Access to legal services, protection referrals, etc. Humanitarian diplomacy to include protection from violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation against children, and protect and assist UASC in disaster laws; promoting International Humanitarian Law including the protection of children in conflict	Codes of conduct, child safeguarding policies, complaints mechanisms, safe recruitment, protection referrals	Child-friendly consultations, focus group discussions, child-led design processes, etc.
Who's at Risk	Children in emergencies and in fragile contexts: displaced, separated, detained, undocumented, survivors of violence, children with intersecting vulnerabilities, (e.g. gender, disability, ethnicity, caste)	Any child interacting with National Society staff, volunteers, partners, suppliers, and contractors	Children in emergencies and in fragile contexts

Ensure all personnel interacting with children have been screened for safety

This includes reference and formal background checks. For instance, following safe recruitment procedures, systematically checking with prior employers to ensure potential volunteers and staff do not pose a threat to children, and having personnel confirm that they have not harmed children in the past.

Resources

[IFRC Safer Recruitment and Induction Procedures Guidelines](#)

[IFRC Recruitment and Induction Checklist](#)

[IFRC Statement of Conduct Template](#)



Require everyone interacting with children to understand their child safeguarding responsibilities

Ensure all personnel interacting with children sign and are briefed on National Society institutional **Child Safeguarding Policy, Prevention and Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Policy, and Code of Conduct**. Where these policies are not in place, National Societies can consider drafting temporary checklists, guidance notes, and other support tools while policies are being drafted.

Resources available on IFRC Learning Platform:

IFRC e-learning module on Child Safeguarding from Policy to Practice

IFRC e-learning module on Introduction to Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) IFRC e-learning A Guide to Psychological First Aid

IFRC e-learning Psychological First Aid for Children



Promote the well-being of personnel

Working with UASC can be emotionally demanding and, at times, distressing. Volunteers and staff are often exposed to stories of trauma, uncertainty, and loss, which can affect their own mental health and well-being. For those engaged in frontline support or protection work, self-care is not a luxury — it is a professional responsibility and an ethical imperative.

National Societies must ensure that all personnel working with UASC have access to mental health and psychosocial support, reflective supervision, peer support networks, and stress management resources. This aligns with the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement's MHPSS Framework (2021) and the IFRC Staff and Volunteer Wellbeing Framework, which emphasize that the well-being of humanitarian actors is integral to effective and safe programming.

Where possible, implement:

- Regular team debriefs and supportive supervision
- Access to individual or group counselling when needed
- Training on stress, burnout, and coping strategies
- Policies that encourage rest, time off, and psychological safety

Neglecting staff and volunteer well-being risks secondary trauma, burnout, and reduced quality of care — ultimately affecting the children they aim to protect. Promoting staff well-being is therefore a core component of child protection and of sustainable humanitarian action.

Resources

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement's Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Framework

IFRC Staff and Volunteer Wellbeing Framework



Support personnel to use referral services for child protection or safeguarding concerns

- Ensure personnel know their local legal responsibilities for reporting any child protection concerns relating to children.
- Have available information on local emergency services that can be contacted if a child during a child participation session is in immediate danger.
- Provide personnel with updated information on local referral services for child protection.

Support for personnel includes equipping teachers, carers, and frontline staff involved in identification, documentation, tracing, and reunification with basic training in how to communicate with, listen to, and support children. People in these roles should understand that children may exhibit a range of reactions after distressing events such as changes in behavior, sleep disturbances, anxiety, or withdrawal. Those changes should be responded to with sensitivity and support, and may change and be unpredictable or unexpected.

Resources



Danish Red Cross Safe Referral Guidelines:

- Full Guidelines - digital download (A4):
[Danish RC_Safe Referrals Guidelines_A4.pdf](#)
- Pocket Guide - digital download (A4):
[Danish RC_Safe Referrals Guidelines_Pocket Guide_A4.pdf](#)
- Pocket Guide Cards - for printing/smart phone (pocket size):
[Danish RC_Safe Referrals Guidelines_Pocket Guide_Cards.pdf](#)

IFRC Referral pathways for Survivors of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

National Society's local complaints mechanism OR IFRC Integrity Line:
[Report a concern | IFRC](#)

Document all personnel who interact with children

It is important that a National Society knows who, when, and where personnel and any visitors or partners are interacting with children. This assists National Societies to enhance child safeguarding by ensuring that interactions with children are documented.

Resources



IFRC Guidance on Documenting Personnel who Work with Children in IFRC Operations or Programmes


[IFRC Field Visits and Child Safeguarding Tool](#)

Undertake the Child Safeguarding Risk Analysis and Action Plan

The IFRC Child Safeguarding Risk Analysis helps identify and rate the child protection risks of any intervention to strengthen child safeguarding practices and reduce the risk of harm towards children. Complementing the Child Safeguarding Risk Analysis is the Child Safeguarding Risk Analysis Action Plan that helps clearly define steps a National Society will take.

Resources

- [IFRC Child Safeguarding Risk Analysis](#)
- [IFRC Child Safeguarding Risk Analysis Tutorial video](#)



Three Indonesia Red Cross youth volunteers helping to reconnect families separated during the Lombok earthquakes. Photo credit: IFRC

Actions for Prevention

How Becoming Unaccompanied or Separated Can Occur

Separation of children from their families and caregivers can occur in many situations. For example:

- **During moments of panic**, such as when fleeing from armed conflict or getting lost in large crowds, particularly when crossing borders.
- **While boarding or disembarking transportation** like buses, boats, or trains, where overcrowding can lead to children becoming separated from their caregivers.
- **When an adult accompanying a child leaves temporarily**, for instance, to search for food, and does not return due to unforeseen circumstances.
- **When an adult accompanying a child is detained by authorities**, or when both adults and children are detained but held in separate locations.
- **When parents or legal/customary caregivers fall ill or die** during migration, due to health reasons, or in a disaster or conflict.
- In extreme cases, children can be intentionally separated from their parents by **immigration or law enforcement** officials¹⁴, including practices such as child-parent separation in detention.
- Also in extreme cases, children can also be intentionally separated from their parents by **smugglers or traffickers**,¹⁵ as a means of exerting control, facilitating SGBV or human trafficking, or to optimise loading of boats or trucks.
- In some cases, children might become unaccompanied when **families intentionally send children out alone** to find opportunities to settle in other locations for economic, safety, or educational reasons.
- Children might also choose to leave home alone to escape child marriage, child labour, or other forms of violence, abuse, neglect, or exploitation.

Prevention of Separation

To prevent separation in emergencies, several practical actions can be taken with local communities.

- **Engage with affected communities and host populations** to raise awareness about the risks of separation and how to mitigate them.¹⁶

Ensure this includes reaching out specifically to adolescents with clear messages on how to stay safe, laws and rights, and what to consider if they are seeking to move alone (including on the risks and indicators of human trafficking, and where and how to access essential services during migration).

For young children, help them learn at the earliest age possible, or to always carry with them a paper with their full name and that of their parents/caregivers, their birth date, their caregivers' phone numbers and the name of the place where they live. And support children to agree with their parents/caregivers a safe assembly point in case of separation.

13 Separation of children: causes, impacts and mitigation strategies, <https://www.fmreview.org/dangerous-journeys/ariascubas-bhardwaj-robins-stockwell/>

14 Caring for Children Moving Alone: Protecting Unaccompanied and Separated Children MOOC, <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/caring-for-children-moving-alone>

15 It is important to distinguish between human trafficking and smuggling of migrants. From a legal point of view, the key element of human trafficking is its purpose, namely exploitation. However, it can be complex to distinguish between the two in practice. Even though smuggling of migrants is often understood as a transactional agreement between two parties who consent, it is important to note that migrant smuggling also happens under often dangerous and degrading conditions and may, in some instances, imply means of coercion, fraud or force. Smuggled migrants can also easily become victims of trafficking in transit or at their destination. See: Action to Assist and Protect Trafficked Persons, Guidance for European National Societies on Assistance and Protection to Victims of Human Trafficking, https://www.trafficking-response.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/20171013_GuidanceNotes_Trafficking_Spreads.pdf

16 Save the Children, **Working with Separated Children – A Field Guide**, p. 30-31.

- At high-risk locations, such as border crossings, **provide identity bracelets to help reunite children if they get separated**. For example, by placing an identity bracelet with the name, contact information, and caregiver name on each child's wrist and matching bracelets on the child's caregiver's wrist as they cross borders. Reinforce this with activities for children and caregivers to explain how the bracelets work and what information should be memorized.
- **Informing the public:** Educate the general public on:
 - How to report any known separated children.
 - Steps adults can take who have been separated from their children.
- **Establish coordination and collaboration with local authorities and other key stakeholders.** Ideally joint plans and coordinated actions can be agreed.

Identification and Referral

Identification is the process of establishing which children have been separated from their families or other caregivers, and where they may be found.¹⁷

Identification Process:

- **Establish separation:** Identification involves determining which children have been separated from their families or caregivers, finding their location, and understanding if the children are with any siblings. Immediate identification is crucial, as the child's family or caregiver may still be nearby.
- **Careful identification:** Handle the identification process with care to avoid inadvertently causing new separations. For instance, widespread announcements about assistance for UASC can sometimes lead parents to instruct their children to register as separated in order to access any perceived benefits or lure people that may want to harm children to sites where children are told to access support.
- **Proactive measures:** Organize identification efforts similarly to separation prevention strategies. Trained staff should monitor areas with high traffic or potential separation points, such as transit sites or refugee camps, especially during high-movement times like night or meal-times, in order to share protection and assistance messages.
- **Initial care:** When a child is identified as UASC, ensure the child's safety and speak to the child to understand their situations and to provide Psychological First Aid, then interview nearby adults who know the child, may have interacted with the child, or were around the child to confirm the separation. Keep the child in the area where they were found, preserving their clothing and possessions in case their family is nearby.¹⁸ Immediately notify the appropriate child protection agencies or authorities responsible, for example for temporary care and family tracing and reunification.
- **Provide timely, clear, and accessible information:** During the identification phase, efforts should be carefully designed to avoid unintended consequences, such as confusion or anxiety among children or families. At the same time, it is essential to ensure that UASC receive timely, clear, and accessible information about their rights and the services available to them.
- **Document:** Carefully document actions taken. This can later help with reporting, supporting evidence-based decision-making, and strengthening accountability.

¹⁷ Inter-Agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children, p. 33.

¹⁸ Save the Children, **Working with Separated Children – A Field Guide**, p. 31.

Planning for Prevention of Separation

Within National Societies, the protection and assistance of UASC can be included into planning processes. For example:

- Integration of UASC risks into emergency Standard Operating Procedures;
- Highlighting UASC within early warning systems and anticipatory actions;
- Inclusion of UASC considerations into PER assessments and readiness plans; and
- Adding UASC into emergency planning and simulations.

Resources

IFRC Key Messages for Adolescents: Restoring Family Links / Migration / MHPSS



Mexico Red Cross volunteer supporting Restoring Family Links activities among migrants. Photo credit: IFRC

Assessing the Overall Needs and Capacities of UASC

Conducting Needs Assessments

The aim of assessments in this section is to determine the overall needs of and support systems for UASC populations, not the needs of specific individual children which require specialized skills and processes. To determine the extent of family separation and assess the situation of affected children, it is crucial to carry out assessments at the earliest possible stage. These assessments ensure that children are not placed or kept in unsuitable temporary care placements for extended periods while further decisions are being made and that they receive other necessary support promptly.¹⁹

Emergency Needs Assessment (ENA): When conducting a local ENA include questions on UASC. The ENA has a list of UASC specific questions (under PGI tab) and can be used in assessments at the onset of an emergency.

Assessments for detailed programming with UASC: If a National Society has determined it will deliver specific programming with UASC, they may be involved in direct assessments with children. These detailed individual child focused assessments should only be done where National Societies have the staff and volunteer capacities around case management to do this without causing any harm and where the National Society is committed to taking action on the assessment findings.

Guidelines for conducting assessments:

- **Multidisciplinary teams:** As far as possible, assessments should be conducted by a multidisciplinary team familiar with issues related to separated children in emergencies, knowledgeable about the historical, social, legal, and political situation, and skilled in child-centred assessment methods. At the very least, the team should be thoroughly briefed on the local separated children's issues.
- **Community participation:** Actively involve members of the affected community. Careful judgment is required when selecting local team members, especially in highly politicized circumstances where individuals may seek to use the assessment to pursue personal agendas.
- **Utilize existing knowledge:** Build on existing knowledge and documentation, reviewing any prior assessments involving the same population. This includes conducting a secondary review of existing information.
- **Periodic assessments:** Conduct assessments periodically as the situation of separated children can change over time, sometimes radically, due to new factors emerging.
- **Inter-agency cooperation:** Joint assessments by two or more specialized agencies are recommended to pave the way for a strong coordinated response later on. If joint assessments are not possible, findings should be shared between concerned agencies.
- **Field methods:** Use direct observation, interviews, and focus groups with a broad range of key community informants and leaders, including children, religious leaders, women's groups, local and national authorities, teachers, soldiers, prison authorities, orphanage staff, local and international NGOs, and UN staff. Ensure field methods are ethical, inclusive, and child-centred.
- **Community sensitization:** Conduct assessments in a way that sensitizes the community, authorities, non-governmental organizations, and others regarding issues related to UASC.²⁰

Resources

IFRC Emergency Needs Assessment



¹⁹ Caring for Children Moving Alone: Protecting Unaccompanied and Separated Children MOOC, <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/caring-for-children-moving-alone>

²⁰ Inter-Agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children, pp. 30-32.

Conducting a Protection, Gender, and Inclusion Analysis

To better understand and address the distinct needs of UASC, including factors around gender and disability, as part of assessments conduct a comprehensive PGI Analysis.²¹

1. Compile secondary information from existing documents.
2. Collect new (primary) information. Once the emergency has occurred, a lot of new information will become available.
3. Analyse the information. Some basic analysis includes:
 - Summarising the impacts of the crisis on UASC by stating what the gender, inclusion and protection issues were before the crisis, and how they have changed since the emergency.
 - Listing the capacities and resources of UASC boys and girls.
 - Listing the dynamics between UASC based on gender, age, ethnicity, language, religion, etc.
 - Listing any specific child protection concerns.
 - Specifically examining the issues affecting UASC boys and girls with living with disabilities.
 - Considering if there are issues that can be addressed through advocacy to local leaders and decision-makers.
4. Make practical recommendations and share the analysis.

PGI assessment snapshot: sample gendered & intersectional risks for UASC

DOMAIN	UASC BOYS	UASC GIRLS	UASC NON-BINARY CHILDREN
Protection Risks	Suppression of trauma; underreported SGBV due to masculinity norms; risk of forced recruitment Compounding Risk: Untreated trauma leading to aggression, isolation, radicalisation, or long-term emotional shutdown	SGBV, trafficking, child marriage; cultural constraints on mobility Compounding Risk: Repeated abuse, school dropout, lifelong health issues, intergenerational trauma	Harassment, identity erasure, invisibility in systems Compounding Risk: Chronic rejection, heightened suicide ideation, disengagement from services
National Society / organisation's responsibility	Avoidance of care; untreated injuries or infections; shame around SRH Compounding Risk: Long-term health decline, reproductive health neglect, mental breakdowns masked as stoicism	Barriers to menstrual hygiene, SRH, antenatal care; stigma if pregnant Compounding Risk: Malnutrition, maternal mortality, unsafe abortions, forced dependence	No access to gender-affirming care; fear of being "outed" in medical settings Compounding Risk: Undiagnosed dysphoria, self-harm, refusal of healthcare
MHPSS Needs	Pressure to appear "strong"; stigma around expressing emotions Compounding Risk: Internalised violence, depression masked as risk-taking, suicide	Impact of repeated violations; silenced grief Compounding Risk: Deep trauma, numbness, hypervigilance, reduced trust in all adults	Exclusion, fear of expressing identity, bullying Compounding Risk: Deep trauma, substance use, dissociation, identity suppression

DOMAIN	UASC BOYS	UASC GIRLS	UASC NON-BINARY CHILDREN
Education Access	Prioritised for work; low encouragement to stay in school Compounding Risk: Child labour and exploitation, radicalisation, permanent illiteracy	Pulled from school for protection, domestic work or due to pregnancy Compounding Risk: Lifelong economic exclusion, dependency, gendered poverty	School environments unsafe or hostile Compounding Risk: Chronic dropout, invisibility in data, no skills certification
Participation / Engagement	Voices heard only in masculine-coded issues (e.g. security) Compounding Risk: Emotional repression, poor decision-making, toxic gender roles	Often excluded from consultations; overruled by adults Compounding Risk: Disempowerment, silence, resignation to abuse	Rarely engaged due to lack of recognition Compounding Risk: Disengagement from formal systems, invisibility in programming

Improving Data Collection and Management

Effective support for UASC requires robust data collection that is collected and stored in ethical ways that meets Red Cross and Red Crescent standards, and is then thoroughly analysed.²² Accurate data ensures that resources reach those in need and informs the development of appropriate services and policies. Improving data collection efforts and incorporating gender and age analyses are crucial steps toward addressing the specific needs of children.

Ethical considerations in assessments:

- **Best interest of the child:** think of the wellbeing of the child when conducting the assessment (taking into consideration their personal context, situation and needs).
- Commitment to follow-up: Ensure follow-up actions (including referrals) if required.
- **Do no harm:** Avoid actions that may stigmatize or endanger children, including reinforcing gender-based discrimination.
- **Follow informed consent/assent:** ensure children (and/or their guardians) are informed as to the purpose of the assessment and the nature of their participation, and respect their decision about participating, including their dissent or unwillingness to participate or their decision to withdraw.²³
- **Ensure data protection:** ensure that data is collected, used and protected in a way that considers children's privacy and any risks that may come to them.²⁴
- **Ensure all images/photos of children used in social and other media are safe** and follow IFRC guidelines.
- **Manage expectations:** Refrain from creating false expectations.
- **Analyze context:** Analyze causes and patterns of separation and the community's attitudes towards orphaned or separated children.

22 IDAC Data InSIGHT # 1, **The urgent need for better data to protect children on the move**, (2021), p. 5.

23 Informed consent, <https://childethics.com/informed-consent/>

24 Data Protection: Brief Overview, https://www.ifrc.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/IM%20DATAPROT_flyer_final-EN_validated.pdf



Libyan Red Crescent volunteer provides support to migrants, including support to Unaccompanied and Separated Children. Photo credit: IFRC

Using Child-Specific Tools

Use appropriate tools to hear directly from UASC, ensuring that this is done safely and in line with participation standards. Children have the right to participate in decisions about their care, protection, education, and integration. Caregivers and service providers must provide accessible information and guidance to support meaningful participation. This includes translating information into the child's first language, making specific adaptations for children living with disabilities, and ensuring children understand their rights and options.

Resources

[IFRC Child Participation Toolkit](#)

[IFRC social media and photography](#)

[International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement Family Links Network Code of Conduct on Data Protection](#)

[Handbook on data protection in humanitarian action | ICRC](#)



Engaging and Empowering UASC

Engaging with and providing leadership opportunities for children on the move is essential to identify protection risks and implement effective solutions. This approach ensures that children have a voice in the decisions that affect their lives and empowers them to contribute to their own protection, education, and well-being.

Working in a Child-Friendly Manner

- **Communicate appropriately:** Always respond in a child-friendly, caring, and trusting manner, avoiding authoritarian communication. Take the time that is needed for children to communicate and feel heard.
- **Avoid stigmatization:** Work in a way that does not stigmatize, frighten, or endanger children.
- **Be sensitive:** Understand, respect, and be sensitive to a child's personal history, family relations, and cultural, religious, and social background.
- **Be gender sensitive:** Recognize that while all children have the same rights, not all children always have access to these rights because of their gender. Specifically, children of different genders can be treated differently and have different access to power in making decisions and how they are treated. In addition, respect that children's sexual orientation and gender identity can influence how they perceive safety and access to support services.
- **Create safe spaces:** Meet in a comfortable, safe space. This can be in sight of others but out of their hearing, or in a private location when there are at least two personnel together interacting with the child; ideally one of the personnel is the same gender as the child.
- **Avoid public attention:** Do not work with children in public places where they may attract unwanted attention.
- **Clarify roles and processes:** Ensure the child knows who you are, your role, why you are meeting, and what will happen afterward.
- **Provide necessary information:** Give children all the information they need about their rights and entitlements, as well as the processes and procedures they may go through, in an age-appropriate manner.
- **Set realistic expectations:** Be clear about what is not possible and give children time to process the information.
- **Build trust:** Reassure children and give them a sense of control over what is happening.
- **Show empathy:** Express empathy, positive feelings, and explore the topics they want to discuss.
- **Respect confidentiality:** Let children know their personal information will be shared only with those who need it to support and protect them.
- **Allocate sufficient time:** Allow enough time for meetings with children.
- **Listen actively:** Truly listen to children and use different communication methods appropriate for their age and capacities, such as talking, drawing, painting, or playing.
- **Avoid pressure:** Do not pressurize children and find other ways to seek information and verification on difficult topics using child-friendly materials and tools.
- **Recognize distress:** Be attentive to signs of distress in children and take time to answer any questions they may have, confirming their understanding of what will happen next.

Facilitating Child Participation

To fully engage children and empower them to express their views and influence decisions, it is important to:

- **Facilitate participation:** Do everything possible to support a child's participation and empower them to express their views and influence decisions. Keep children informed in a transparent, age-appropriate manner, and involve them in decisions affecting their lives. Children have a right to know what is happening to them and to meaningfully participate in shaping their care and protection plans.
- **Consider children's views:** Truly consider children's views and incorporate them into decision-making processes.
- **Maintain honesty:** Be honest with children, manage their expectations, and avoid promising unattainable outcomes to prevent feelings of mistrust and disappointment.

- **Provide realistic information:** Give children information that reflects reality and help them be part of achievable decision-making processes.
- **Explain decision-making roles:** Clarify that professionals will make decisions in the child's best interest based on their expertise.
- **Use inclusive and age-appropriate materials:** Provide information leaflets in the child's own language when possible, supplemented by verbal communication. Also work to ensure that materials are adapted for children living with various disabilities.
- **Ongoing information:** Update children promptly and continuously as situations and processes change, ensuring they understand what is happening, where they are moving, and why.
- **Specialized professionals:** Ensure information is provided by professionals specialized in protecting migrant and refugee children, with the help of interpreters who speak the child's first language. When working with children living with disabilities, include communication supports such as sign language interpretation, "easy-to-read" written language and any assistive devices that can support communication.
- **Peer-to-peer communication:** Use accurate peer-to-peer information through social media to communicate with children who have arrived in a country.
- **Clarify roles:** Inform children about the different roles of relevant authorities.

Resources



IFRC Child Participation Toolkit

Restoring Family Links Network

Explaining Restoring Family Links (RFL) to Children - EN on Vimeo



A Red Cross staff on the Ocean Viking Rescue Ship supports the disembarkation of 306 survivors, including Unaccompanied and Separated Children, in Pozzallo, Sicily. Photo credit: IFRC

Delivering Essential Services for UASC

As part of their fundamental rights, all UASC need to have access to essential services, regardless of their legal standing, age, gender or health status. Essential services include access to protection, health and Mental Health and Psychosocial Support, education, legal counsel, information, shelter, recreation, clothing and nutrition.

When governments are unable or unwilling to provide these services, Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies can help provide this care to UASC either directly or by helping to reduce barriers that children may have to access these services from other agencies. Providing access to essential services is crucial and can complement other projects that a National Society delivers to UASC. Where a National Society does not have other specific projects for UASC, providing access to essential services can be done as a minimum action.

Based on local needs, the capacity and expertise of the National Society, and work already being pursued by partners, the National Society can determine what services it may be best positioned to support, in what ways, and for how long.

National Societies will determine what services they are best able to provide and in what form. Services available vary and can be delivered in targeted ways, such as focusing on one or two services like inclusion of UASC in reception facilities and providing RFL, or as comprehensive packages that include a host of services such as reception facilities and guardianship, MHPSS, support to access education, and RFL.

If a National Society is unable to provide essential services directly, it can partner with other agencies. For example, support an external agency around procurement of goods, construction or materials for shelter, support access to other agencies, etc.

As auxiliaries to the public authorities in the humanitarian field, National Societies also have a responsibility to advocate for those in the most vulnerable situations, including access to essential services for UASC.

Resources

Case studies of National Society actions to protect and assist Unaccompanied and Separated Children



Why Essential Services Are Required

To support children's rights to health, safety, education, and well-being, it is important that all UASC have access to essential services. Specifically, pre-existing social, physical and mental health problems can be exacerbated by their displacement. Importantly, the way displaced, refugee and migrant families are received and how protection and assistance are provided may induce or aggravate problems, for example by undermining human dignity, discouraging mutual support and creating dependency.²⁵

²⁵ IFRC. (2016). Operation Framework for Involvement in Migrant Health and Care Services.

Barriers to Accessing Services

The barriers associated with providing access to essential services can include a lack of available services and governments that might deny or restrict services in order to reduce the amount of time UASC spend in the country. It may become illegal for Red Cross or Red Crescent Societies to provide services, or UASC may not be eligible for services due to their legal status. In addition, UASC may:

- have barriers to accessing life-saving aid.
- face discrimination and xenophobia.
- not understand the language.
- struggle with administrative requirements which cannot be met in the absence of the required documentation.
- lack trust in authorities who might arrest, detain or deport children.
- may be incorrectly recorded or assessed as adults when crossing borders and placed in adult reception facilities.
- fear reprisals from traffickers or smugglers.
- desire not to be identified.
- lack knowledge of what services are available and where.
- have challenges around transport to/cost of services.

The lack of access to essential services can result in greater risk of violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation, and severe psychosocial distress and suffering such as anxiety, depression and withdrawal.

Removing Barriers to Accessing Services

Efforts should be made to remove obstacles that hinder UASC from accessing essential services.

- **Advocacy:** Actively advocate for policies and practices that support UASC in accessing necessary services without impediments.
- **Provide translations and cultural mediation:** Ensure effective communication by using translators and cultural mediators to bridge language and cultural gaps. When working with children living with disabilities, include additional elements to ensure disability-inclusive communication and interpretation.
- **Reduce costs:** Minimize or eliminate any fees associated with accessing services to prevent financial barriers.
- **Information sharing:** Ensure that children are informed about available services and their locations through child-friendly formats, making the information accessible and understandable for their age and capacity.

Priority Actions for Each Essential Service

Education

Education is essential for children of all ages, including UASC. Not only can the information and learning through school and other educational spaces be life-saving for children, but school or other educational space also provides children with stability, structure and hope that is critical to protection, mental health, and for developing skills to thrive in community.

Actions

- Advocate to local government about the rights of UASC to attend school and access education and learning opportunities of any kind, appropriate to their age, educational level/developmental stage and/or interests.
- Support enrolment in school and any other educational center or learning space (including documentation requirements, payment of tuition fees, onboarding/social integration process, etc.).
- Help children and youth access recognition of prior learning and qualifications obtained in their country of origin.
- Provide or support access to catch-up courses or accelerated education programmes.
- Help access transport to and from school or other educational center / learning space.
- Purchase school/learning materials, clothes, hygiene kits, and other necessities (including assistive devices).
- Help make available school-based breakfast and lunch meals.
- Support access to and enrolment in after-school activities and other non-formal education opportunities such as sports, arts (e.g., music, theatre, dance), volunteering, summer camps and youth clubs.

- Provide schooling/educational support to children with specific needs (e.g., related to disabilities, behavioural, social or learning difficulties such as attention deficit disorders, dyspraxia, dyslexia, etc.)
- Provide after-school homework tutorials or assistance.
- Help access life-skills education, including social and emotional learning, humanitarian education (e.g., on first aid, risk reduction, climate change, health, migration, human rights and international humanitarian law, protection, gender and inclusion, water, sanitation and hygiene, etc.), technical and vocational training, leadership and entrepreneurial skills training, etc.
- Deliver Cash for Education.
- Establish and operate Child Friendly Spaces, for young children and adolescents, that offer age appropriate, play-based and trauma-informed approaches to foundational learning, basic education and early childhood development.
- Organise summer camps for children
- Provide or support access to language classes and/or culture classes.

Healthcare

All UASC need to have access to quality, safe healthcare. UASC can struggle with various health issues that they already live with, or due to injuries and harm caused during their migration. Accessing healthcare services can be a barrier due to language and cultural practices, or cost for services, or because UASC fear that healthcare providers may inform local authorities, and fear being placed into government care if they visit health services.

Actions

1. Initial Health Assessment

- Rapid medical screening upon identification or intake.
- Identification of urgent or life-threatening conditions.
- Screening for violence, malnutrition, dehydration, injuries, infections.
- Assessment of immunization status.
- Mental health screening (age-appropriate, culturally sensitive).
- Provide life-saving emergency and first aid including psychological first aid.

2. Primary Health Care

- Access to routine and preventive health services.
- Management of common illnesses (respiratory infections, diarrhea, skin diseases, etc.).
- Immunizations (per national or WHO catch-up schedule).
- Growth monitoring and nutritional assessments.
- Management of chronic conditions (e.g., asthma, epilepsy).
- Referral for specialised health services.
- Reinforce relationships with national health systems, other partners, and migrant and host communities.

3. Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) Services

- Age-appropriate SRH education.
- Access to menstrual hygiene materials.
- Sexual Transmitted Infections (STI) screening and treatment.
- Pregnancy testing and antenatal/postnatal care for adolescent girls.
- Services for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), including clinical management of rape.

4. Dental and Vision Care

- Screening and basic dental care.
- Vision tests and provision of corrective lenses where needed.

5. Specialized Care

- Services for children living with disabilities.
- Care for chronic illnesses or complex medical needs.
- Rehabilitation services (physical or psychosocial).

6. Health Education and Promotion

- Hygiene and sanitation education.
- Nutrition education.
- Information on mental health, substance use, SRH.
- Outbreak awareness where relevant.

7. Health Documentation and Continuity of Care

- Creation and maintenance of a child-held health record.
- Coordination with case management and protection services.
- Clear referral and follow-up pathways.
- Confidentiality and consent processes adapted for UASC.

Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS)

MHPSS commonly includes helping UASC to: gain a sense of self-confidence, control and resilience; feel safe, healthy and dignified; access specialized MHPSS-related services; develop healthy social behaviours; and enhance social connections.²⁶

Actions

- Support local authorities to organize round-table discussions with MHPSS service providers to identify priority needs, processes, ways to collaborate and coordinate, and define solutions to MHPSS-related challenges.
- Train National Society personnel interacting with UASC on MHPSS.
- Help train local authorities on MHPSS.
- Support peer-to-peer mentorship among UASC.
- Share non-confidential MHPSS-related data, assessments, and monitoring or evaluation results with authorities in order to influence their decision-making.
- Support communication between UASC and their families, where it is safe and appropriate to do so.
- Help UASC access local MHPSS referrals and specialized resources, including for child protection, trafficking, and prevention and response to SGBV.
- Ensure that all staff and volunteers working with UASC are trained in Psychological First Aid (PFA), as they may be the first point of contact for children immediately after distressing or traumatic events.
- Provide psychosocial first aid.
- Establish child friendly spaces.
- Restore a sense of normalcy by ensuring access to basic needs, structured daily activities, and opportunities for play, education, and connection with others. Tailor interventions to build resilience and reinforce protective family and community networks. Implement child resilience programmes that involve children, parents and school personnel.
- Include MHPSS personnel as part of reception centre and outreach teams that work with UASC.

²⁶ UStanding Committee (IASC) Reference Group for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings, A Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings, IASC, Geneva, 2017. <https://www.mhpps.net/toolkit/emergency/resource/a-common-monitoring-and-evaluation-framework-for-mental-health-and-psychosocial-support-in-emergency-settings>

Recreation and cultural activities

Recreation and cultural activities can be valuable in assisting UASC to maintain their health, improve their mental health, enhance social networks, learn local cultures, and integrate into local communities.

Actions

- Support enrolment in school or other educational centre or learning space, and/or in community sports or leisure clubs.
- Help purchase art, sports or other leisure equipment.
- Partner with recreation centres and cultural programs to provide free memberships for UASC.
- Create opportunities to visit and participate in art, music, theatre, dance and other cultural or recreational events, trainings, and workshops.
- Connect UASC with local Red Cross Red Crescent youth volunteers in order to develop joint projects and participate in local sport and cultural events.

Legal counsel

Legal counsel plays a crucial role in supporting UASC by ensuring they have legal representation to navigate local immigration processes and to ensure their rights are respected. A legal representative can assist UASC to understand their rights, prepare for immigration and asylum processes and care arrangements, and appeal decisions, if necessary.

Actions

- Advocate for all UASC to have access to timely, quality, free and culturally appropriate legal advice and representation.
- Support UASC to understand their legal rights and where they can access legal support and counsel.
- Help provide transport to attend legal meetings and interviews.
- Provide or help UASC access cultural interpreters that can help them understand issues and translate key concepts. When working with children living with disabilities, ensure they have access to appropriate interpretation and communication devices and support.

Nutrition

UASC can have challenges accessing nutritious food. This may be due to cost, not knowing where to access nutritious food, being surrounded by foods that are culturally different from what they eat at home, and dependence on others for meals and care.

Actions

- Provide nutrition guidelines and local nutrition resources.
- Consult with UASC to understand their dietary preferences and needs.
- Support access to school-based breakfast and lunch meals.
- Work with local food suppliers and restaurants to provide vouchers so UASC can access nutritious food and meals.
- Partner with local NGOs to provide gardening and/or cooking classes.

Clothing

Clothing that fits, is weather appropriate, and allows UASC dignity is essential. National Societies can take various actions to support UASC to access adequate clothing.

Actions

- Work with local retailers to provide vouchers so UASC can shop for new or used clothes.
- Conduct clothing drives to collect new or used clothes.
- Partner with other agencies that collect new or used clothes in order to provide UASC with clothing.
- Support opportunities for UASC to learn skills to stitch and repair clothing.
- Distribute clothes at reception and transit centres.
- Run local second-hand clothes shops.

Reception facilities

Reception services are actions taken to provide lodging and basic amenities to people seeking asylum while they transit through a country, wait for their asylum status to be determined, or wait to transition to other accommodation. Reception services for UASC need to be set up in accordance with national legislation regarding infrastructure, safety and privacy. They also need to reflect the special protection, assistance and care required for each child using the services.

Reception services for UASC can include managing reception centres, providing services like health care, education, and MHPSS within reception centres, and connecting UASC within reception centres with local government and NGO services.

For UASC, reception centres are one option for providing appropriate care. Other, often more preferable options, include: reunification with adult relatives, foster placement, or if necessary, placement in suitable and safe institutions for the care of children on the move. A reception structure is assigned by the authorities of a country to which UASC arrive from the moment the UASC present to the authorities.

Reception should be guaranteed for UASC regardless of the type of regularisation pathway pursued, in accordance with the principle that all children are entitled to protection and care irrespective of their administrative or legal status.

Actions

- Advocate to government and other decision makers to ensure that adequate reception services are provided to UASC, where a National Society is unable to provide reception services directly.
- Advocate to government and other decision makers to ensure that UASC wrongly recorded as adults can access a child-focused age assessment and receive appropriate reception services in the interim period.
- Advocate also for the need for children to access Restoring Family Links services.
- Provide separate sleeping areas for UASC away from adults.
- Ensure there is 24-hour supervision of UASC and presence of professional staff.
- Ensure heightened security mechanisms to protect UASC in reception facilities.
- Have a code of conduct that includes guidelines on unacceptable behaviour from personnel toward children and guidelines on the prevention of violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation.
- All UASC in reception centres should have access to:
 - Mental health and psychosocial support.
 - Medical assistance.
 - Legal assistance.
 - Guidance on the asylum procedure.
 - Education (e.g., local schools, language training, vocational training, life skills training, etc.).
 - Sport and cultural activities (in or outside the reception structure).
 - Nutritious food.
- Aim to have a ratio of one professionally trained staff person, such as a social worker, for up to three UASC in a reception centre.
- Post in visible locations MHPSS and protection referral services, including for child protection, trafficking, and prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).
- Establish child-friendly spaces within reception facilities.
- Manage male and female UASC in the same facility by creating safe spaces for each group apart, but communal spaces as well where it is safe and culturally appropriate to interact with each other.
- Provide access to safe, inclusive, and child-friendly spaces that support psychosocial recovery. These may include recreational and cultural activities, education, social interaction, and — where appropriate — access to digital communication to maintain connections and continuity.

Guardianship

Guardians are normally authorized by local authorities. Qualifications, screening procedures, required training, and monitoring support for guardians can vary by country and location. However, often guardians are expected to have professional qualifications and experience working with children in vulnerable situations. Common roles and responsibilities of a guardian include ensuring that:

- all decisions have the child's best interests as a primary consideration.
- the child's view and opinions are taken into consideration in all decision affecting the child.
- the child has suitable care, accommodation, education, language support and health-care provisions, and the child is able to practise their religion and cultural traditions.
- the child is assisted in any legal procedure concerning their application for international protection, and when any other durable solution is offered.
- exploring, together with the child, the possibility of family tracing and reunification, and assist the child to keep in touch with their family where appropriate.
- Providing a link to organizations that provide services, and ensure transparency and cooperation between the child and the various organizations.
- advocating on the child's behalf. In relation to asylum cases, a guardian's main role is to provide support and guidance for the child. Common examples are:
 - Provide support and guidance for the child in regards to the legal pathway being pursued and other matters of importance. This includes providing an understanding of the child's own position within the asylum system and larger legal framework.
 - Prepare the child for meetings with authorities: where the meeting is, who it is with, possible outcomes, the significance of these outcomes and appeal options.
 - Follow up with the child when the child is notified of a major ruling or development in the case. UASC are often under great emotional pressure and may be overwhelmed by the meaning and consequences of such a development, and therefore this follow-up support will often take place a day or two later.
 - Inform the child of available appeal options, in the event of a ruling contrary to the child's desired outcome, and help the child file a complaint if needed.

Actions:

- Ensure that UASC have rights to guardianship regardless of their legal standing, age, gender or health status.
- In order to do no harm, guardians need to be well-trained, screened, supported and monitored.
- Guardians should be appointed until a durable solution has been identified and implemented. Where a durable solution is secured before the child turns 18 years old, the role may continue up to the child's 18th birthday if this is appropriate.
- Procedures for the appointment of a guardian must not be less favourable than the existing national administrative or judicial procedures used for appointing guardians for national children.
- Children should be provided opportunities to actively participate in decisions that affect them.
- Actions concerning UASC should adhere to international standards.
- All UASC need to be treated by guardians with dignity and respect and receive support to achieve self-reliance.
- Guardianship support needs to be culturally appropriate.
- If family members of the UASC arrive after the appointment of a guardian, the guardian should remain in their role until the nature and safety of the relationship between the child and apparent family members has been thoroughly examined.
- Advocate for government systems that provide guardianship to be prepared to meet the needs of large numbers of UASC, including in time of emergency.

Supporting Restoring Family Links (RFL) and tracing

The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement carries out its Restoring Family Links (RFL) activities strictly for a humanitarian purpose.

RFL is the generic term for a range of activities that aim at preventing separation and disappearances, restoring and maintaining contact between separated family members and clarifying the fate of persons reported missing. Those activities include organizing the exchange of family news; tracing individuals; registering and following up with individuals to prevent their disappearance and to enable families to be informed of their whereabouts; reuniting and repatriating families; collecting, managing and forwarding information on the dead; forwarding official documents; and issuing travel documents.

Tracing of individuals is a term used to describe all activities related to the search for missing family members. These activities are undertaken by the ICRC and National Societies in response to families' right to know what has happened to their missing relatives.

The following should be considered when accepting RFL requests concerning children, in order to ensure a common and consistent approach to the RFL work for all components of the Family Links Network.²⁷

- National Societies should accept to help to trace family members of UASC provided that the request comes from the child. National Societies should also accept tracing requests from family members looking for children.
- National Societies should always be guided primarily by the best interests of the child, which constitute the basic standard for guiding decisions and actions taken to help children. However, a person has the right not to be found. In the case that a family member does not want to be reunited with the person seeking them, no contact details of the person traced should be disclosed to the enquirer without the consent of the traced person.
 - Tracing the family of UASC does not necessarily end in the child being reunited with his or her family. While the ultimate goal is generally family reunification, this is not always possible, desired or in a child's best interest. Before family reunification can take place, both the child and the family must be in agreement with the family reunification, and the child's best interest must be considered.
 - External circumstances (e.g. security conditions in the country of the proposed reunification), as well as the consent of family members are determining factors. In instances where family reunification is not feasible, the work of the National Societies should be limited to helping restore and maintain contact between the child and his or her family, if that is in the best interests of the child.

National Societies should treat tracing information as confidential data. Only the child, or in certain circumstances, the legal guardian should be informed of the results of the tracing efforts. This information may be shared with third parties only if the child, or in certain circumstances, the legal guardian, provides informed consent.

Resources

[Restoring Family Links Network](#)



²⁷ ICRC. (2011). *Special Note to National Societies on Separated and Unaccompanied Children in Europe*. For additional guidance, please see ICRC (2010), *Guidelines on Providing Restoring Family Links Services to Persons Separated as a Result of Migration*.

Humanitarian Diplomacy on Issues Related to UASC

National Societies play a crucial role in Humanitarian Diplomacy with the aim of improving implementation for protection and assistance of UASC. This includes staying informed about the situation of UASC in their country, especially during emergencies, drawing on existing data and evidence, and applying a gender and diversity lens to ensure the needs and capacities of different groups of UASC are recognized.

Family Reunification

Key humanitarian diplomacy messages:

- **Right to family life:** Advocate for states to uphold the right to family life by applying favorable rules for beneficiaries of international protection and facilitating swift family reunification procedures. Rapid family reunification is essential to children's psychological and social well-being. Recovery is most likely to occur when children are cared for by trusted family members or familiar adults.
- **Avoiding resettlement quotas:** Ensure that family reunification is not limited by resettlement quotas or other restrictions.
- **Reunification of extended family:** Support the development of safe and effective avenues for the reunification of extended family members to enhance safety and protection.
- **Removing barriers:** Work to eliminate disproportionate administrative and practical obstacles, ensuring that beneficiaries of international protection and their family members can exercise their right to family life in a fair and timely manner.
- **Broad definition of family:** Advocate for a broad interpretation of "family member" in legislation, considering dependency and vulnerabilities, and prioritize the best interests of the child in all family reunification-related policies and laws.
- **Holistic approach:** Promote a protection-oriented, inclusive approach to family reunification, ensuring that families receive necessary support at every stage of the process.

Resources

Red Cross and Red Crescent Pledge on Restoring Family Links: Preserving Family Unity, Supporting Family Reunification (2024).²⁸

Red Cross European Union Office Upholding the Right to Family Reunification for Beneficiaries of International Protection in Europe.²⁹



Access to Essential Services

If a government is not providing sufficient access to essential services for UASC, and a National Society is also unable to provide essential services directly, it can advocate to government and other decision makers to ensure that essential services are provided to UASC.

²⁸ <https://rcrcconference.org/pledge/restoring-family-links-preserving-family-unity-supporting-family-reunification/>

²⁹ Red Cross European Union Office. (2023). *Upholding the Right to Family Reunification for Beneficiaries of International Protection in Europe. Upholding the right to family reunification for beneficiaries of international protection in Europe – Positions – Red Cross EU Office.*

Key humanitarian diplomacy messages:

- **Safe access for all children:** Ensure that UASC, regardless of age, gender, or legal status, are safe when accessing protection and humanitarian assistance. This includes having guarantees that children have safe access to humanitarian assistance without fear of arrest, detention or deportation. Also that humanitarian organizations can operate without risk of prosecution, and implement data protection protocols to protect confidential information.
- **Suitable care solutions:** Promote access to suitable care solutions for UASC, including foster care and specialized homes.
- **Child friendly approaches:** Essential services need to be child-friendly and tailored to children's specific needs along migratory trails.
- **Child participation:** Children should be provided opportunities to actively participate in decisions that affect them.
- **Meet standards:** Actions concerning UASC should adhere to international standards.
- **Dignified support:** All UASC need to be treated with dignity and respect and receive support to achieve self-reliance.
- **Culturally appropriate:** Interventions and support need to be culturally appropriate, age appropriate, gender and diversity sensitive.
- **Reliable age assessments:** If there is no proof of age, the child should be entitled to a reliable age assessment instead of being classed as an adult. In the case of conflicting or inconclusive evidence, the child should be given the benefit of the doubt.³⁰
- **Coordinated action:** Where multiple government agencies are involved in the provision of essential services, ensure a coordinated approach.
- **Prepare for action:** Encourage government systems to be prepared to meet the needs of large numbers of UASC, including in time of emergency.

Detention of Children Due to Immigration and Asylum Status

Detention of children due to immigration or asylum status should be avoided due to its severe negative impacts on children's physical and mental health and development. Studies show that even brief periods of detention can significantly harm a child's mental and physical well-being.

Key messages for humanitarian diplomacy with authorities:³¹

- **End detention of children due to immigration status:** Stop the detention of children.
- **Children's detention should only be considered in exceptional circumstances:** Ensure that immigration detention is a last resort, with liberty as the default.
- **Develop alternatives to children's detention:** Systematically consider alternatives to detention before resorting to it.
- **Judicial review:** Guarantee timely judicial reviews and effective appeal mechanisms for detention of children.
- **Non-carceral conditions:** Ensure detention conditions are as lenient as possible.
- **Maintain family contact:** Enable child detainees to maintain family contact and access relevant services.
- **Independent monitoring:** Regularly monitor and inspect detention facilities.

Best Interest Assessments

Best Interest Assessments and Determinations are formal processes with strict procedural safeguards designed to determine a child's best interests for particularly important decisions affecting the child. These should be done carefully and be delivered by local authorities or qualified personnel. Article 3.1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child mandates that the best interests of the child must be a primary consideration in all actions affecting children.

30 UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2005). *General Comment Number 6, Treatment of Unaccompanied and Separated Children Outside their Country of Origin*. General comment No. 6 (2005): Treatment of Unaccompanied and Separated Children Outside their Country of Origin | Refworld

31 Red Cross EU Office. (2020). Position Paper - Reducing the Use of Immigration Detention in the EU. <https://redcross.eu/positions-publications/reducing-the-use-of-immigration-detention-in-the-eu>



A parent and child, who were separated during an evacuation, are reunited by the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and Palestinian Red Crescent in Syria. Photo credit: IFRC

Key humanitarian diplomacy message:

- **Advocate for professional Best Interest Assessments and Determinations:** Ensure that all UASC have access to thorough and professional Best Interest of the Child assessments and determinations.

Avoiding Forcible Return

The forcible return of UASC can occur in situations where children are compelled to return to their home country against their will, often due to lack of legal entitlements and discrimination.

- **Do not engage in or support the forcible return:** UASC should not be returned to any destination where they could face violations of their fundamental rights. This includes risks such as torture, cruel or inhuman treatment, arbitrary deprivation of life, or persecution.
- **Adhere strictly to the principle of non-refoulement:** This prohibits returning individuals, including children, to places where they would be at risk of serious harm or rights violations.
- **Ensure safety:** Children should not return until the standards for their safe and dignified returns can be met. Mechanisms must be in place to set standards and measure progress, to ensure that children and their families are achieving durable solutions following their return.³²

³² Forced Migration Review. (2019). *Durable Solutions for Returnee Children*. **Durable solutions for returnee children - Forced Migration Review**

ADDITIONAL MOVEMENT RESOURCES

IFRC/CELCIS **Caring for Children Moving Alone: Protecting Unaccompanied and Separated Children Massive Open Online Course (MOOC)**

IFRC **Alone and Unsafe Report**

IFRC **Comics on Safe Migration for children**

IFRC **Guidelines for Media and Communications Activities with Child Refugees, Asylum seekers or Survivors of Trafficking**

IFRC **Manual on Smart Practices for Working with Migrant Unaccompanied and Separated Children in the Europe Region**

IFRC **Minimum Standards for PGI**

IFRC **Position Paper, Protection and Assistance for Children on the Move**

IFRC **PSEA Poster for Children**

IFRC **Case studies on protection and assistance to UASC**

ICRC **Restoring family links: a guide for National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies**

Movement Migration Lab **Towards Safer Journeys: migrant women and children's experiences of going missing, separation, or dying**

Interagency Tools That The Movement Has Supported

Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action,
Minimum Standards

Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action,
Toolkit on Unaccompanied and Separated Children

Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action,
Field Handbook on Unaccompanied and Separated Children

Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies,
Minimum Standards

Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies and Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action,
Guidance note: Supporting Integrated Child Protection and Education Programming in Humanitarian Action

GLOSSARY

Age-disputed child: A UASC who has arrived in a country claiming to be under 18, but the government authorities record him or her as an adult because they have no identity documents to prove their age.

Alternatives to detention or to deprivation of liberty: Measures (legislation, policy, or practice) aimed at preventing the unnecessary detention of persons, including children being formally processed through the criminal justice system and children who are migrants. Alternatives to detention do not involve deprivation of liberty.³³

Assessment: The process of establishing the impact of a crisis on a society, including needs, risks, capacities and solutions.³⁴

Best Interests of the Child: A foundational principle to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It means that in all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration. This principle should guide the design, monitoring and adjustment of all humanitarian programmes and interventions.³⁵

Caregiver: An individual, community, or institution (including the State) with clear responsibility (by custom or by law) for the well-being of the child. It most often refers to a person with whom the child lives and who provides daily care to the child.³⁶

Case management: An approach to address the needs of an individual child and their family in an appropriate, systematic and timely manner, through direct support and/or referrals.³⁷

Children: Human being below the age of 18 years.³⁸

Child abuse: A deliberate act with actual or potential negative impacts upon the child's safety, wellbeing, dignity, and development. It is an intentional act that takes place in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust, or power. It includes emotional, psychological, physical and sexual abuse.

Child-friendly: Working methods that do not discriminate against children and that take into account their age, evolving capacities, diversity and capabilities. These methods promote children's confidence and ability to learn, speak out, share and express their views. Sufficient time and appropriate information and materials are provided and communicated effectively to children. Staff and adults are approachable, respectful and responsive.³⁹

Child neglect refers to the failure of a caregiver to protect a child from actual or potential harm or to fulfil that child's rights to survival, development, and wellbeing.

An act may be categorized as neglectful whether or not the caregiver intends to harm the child.

A harmful event is only considered neglect by a caregiver when:

- a) The caregiver has the abilities, financial capacities, and knowledge to meet the child's needs, or;
- b) When the caregiver lacks the abilities, financial capacities, and knowledge necessary, and does not take steps to seek the assistance needed to protect or provide for the child.⁴⁰

33 The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. (2019). Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (2019 edition). <https://alliancecpha.org/en/cpms>.

34 *Ibid.*

35 *Ibid.*

36 *Ibid.*

37 *Ibid.*

38 UN. (1989). Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 1. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>.

39 The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. (2019).

40 Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action and Proteknon. (2018). *Discussion Paper on the Review of Existing Definitions and Explanations of Abuse, Neglect, Exploitation, and Violence against Children*. <https://www.alliancecpha.org/en/child-protection-online-library/discussion-paper-review-existing-definitions-and-explanations-abuse>

Child participation: The manifestation of the right of every child to express their view, to have that view given all due consideration, to influence decision-making and to achieve change. It is the informed and willing involvement of all children, including the most marginalised and those of different ages, genders, and disabilities, in any matter concerning them.⁴¹

Child protection: The prevention of and response to abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence against children.⁴²

Child safeguarding: The broad obligation on IFRC personnel, partners, suppliers, and contractors to ensure that the design and delivery of programmes and organisational programmes are in the best interests of the child, do not expose children to adverse impacts, including the risk of violence, abuse, exploitation, or neglect and that any concerns about children's safety within the communities where they work are appropriately reported and responded to.⁴³

Discrimination: Any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference that has a negative impact on certain person(s), for the sole reason that they belong to one (or more) categories of diversity such as those listed above. Non-discrimination consists of taking specific actions that prevent or mitigate such discrimination from occurring.

Diversity: The full range of different social backgrounds and identities that make up populations. It includes, but is not limited to, gender identity, ethnic origin, nationality or citizenship, age, disability, language, political opinions, religious beliefs, social background, sexual orientation, physical appearance, colour and racialized identity.⁴⁴

Gender: The socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for individuals based on the sex they were assigned at birth.

Gender identity: Each person's deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with their sex assigned at birth or the gender attributed to them by society. "Trans", "transgender" and "non-binary" are umbrella terms representing a variety of words that describe an internal sense of gender that differs from the sex assigned at birth and the gender attributed to the individual by society.

Guardianship: Refers to the designation of responsibility to an adult or organization for ensuring that a child's best interests are fully represented.⁴⁵ A comprehensive description of the guardian's role and responsibilities is included in the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children and in the General Comment No 6 by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.⁴⁶

A guardian is different from a "legal representative." Legal representatives, unlike guardians, have a restricted mandate, which is often precisely defined when they are appointed: to represent the child in particular proceedings, such as asylum proceedings.⁴⁷ A guardian's role is more comprehensive and includes supporting a child's well-being and achievement of their best interests. For example, access to essential services.

Humanitarian diplomacy: Humanitarian diplomacy is persuading decision makers and opinion leaders to act, at all times, in the interests of vulnerable people, and with full respect for fundamental humanitarian principles.⁴⁸

41 *Ibid.*

42 *Ibid.*

43 IFRC Secretariat's Policy on Child Safeguarding spells out principles, definitions and roles and responsibilities for the Secretariat.

44 We use the term "racialized" rather than "race" to emphasise both the continuing destructive impacts of racism in the world as well as the damaging aspects of the term "race" to apply to certain groups of people, as the term is contested and a social construct that can underpin racist discrimination.

45 Inter-agency Working Group on Unaccompanied and Separated Children. (2004). *Inter-agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children*. <https://www.icrc.org/en/publication/1101-inter-agency-guiding-principles-unaccompanied-and-separated-children>.

46 UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2005). *General Comment (No. 6): Treatment of Unaccompanied and Separated Children Outside their Country of Origin*. **GE.05-0543805**

47 FRA. (2016). *Overview of Guardianship for Unaccompanied Children in EU MS*. http://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/document.cfm?doc_id=44011

48 IFRC. (2017). *Humanitarian Diplomacy Policy*. **Humanitarian diplomacy policy | IFRC**

Inclusion: Reducing inequalities based on social backgrounds, identities, roles and power relations. Providing inclusive services means giving equitable access to resources for all. In the long term, inclusion also focuses on facilitating access to opportunities and rights for all by addressing, reducing and ending exclusion, stigma and discrimination.

Informed assent: The expressed willingness to participate in services. Informed assent is sought from children who are by nature or law too young to give consent, but who are old enough to understand and agree to participate in services. When obtaining informed assent, practitioners must share, in a child-friendly manner, information on: services and options available, potential risks and benefits, personal information to be collected and how it will be used, and confidentiality and its limits.⁴⁹

Informed consent: Voluntary agreement of an individual who has the capacity to take a decision, who understands what they are being asked to agree to, and who exercises free choice. When obtaining informed consent, practitioners must share, in a child-friendly manner, information on: services and options available, potential risks and benefits, personal information to be collected and how it will be used, and confidentiality and its limits. Informed consent is usually not sought from children under age 15. See also Informed assent.⁵⁰

Mental health and psychosocial support: Is a composite term that describes supports, interventions and programmes that aim to protect or promote psychosocial well-being and to prevent mental disorders.⁵¹ MHPSS focuses on the social and psychological aspects of people's lives. The term "psychosocial" refers to the dynamic relationship between the psychological and social dimension of a person and how these interact. The psychological dimensions include internal emotional and thought processes, feelings and reactions. The social dimensions include relationships, family and community networks, social values and cultural practices.

Migrants: in line with the Movement's strictly humanitarian approach to migration that focuses on migrants' needs and vulnerabilities, irrespective of legal status, type, or category, migrants are defined as persons who leave or flee their habitual residence to go to new places – usually abroad – to seek opportunities or safer and better prospects. Migration can be voluntary or involuntary, but most of the time a combination of choices and constraints are involved. This includes, among others, labour migrants, stateless migrants, and migrants deemed irregular by public authorities. It also concerns refugees and asylum seekers, notwithstanding the fact that they constitute a special category under international law.⁵²

Prevention and Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA): Policy, rules and actions intended to prevent IFRC Personnel or its partners from engaging in any form of sexual exploitation and abuse and to respond where it has occurred.⁵³

Protection: The scope of protection within the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is as follows:

Protecting people affected by, or at risk of being affected by, violations of relevant bodies of law¹ in contexts such as disasters, conflicts, crises and other emergencies, other situations of violence, and persistent poverty, deprivation or inequality.

We aim to prevent or stop such violations by addressing their causes and contributing circumstances, and to alleviate the suffering they cause by addressing their consequences.

We seek to ensure that duty bearers fulfil their obligations to uphold the rights of individuals without discrimination in order to preserve their physical and psychological safety, integrity and dignity.

49 The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. (2019).

50 *Ibid.*

51 Inter-Agency Standing Committee. (2007). Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings.

52 IFRC (2009). Policy on Migration, https://www.ifrc.org/sites/default/files/Migration-Policy_EN.pdf

53 IFRC. (2024). *IFRC Secretariat Policy on Prevention and Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)*. **IFRC Secretariat Policy on Prevention and Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) 2024 | IFRC**

Within the IFRC, the protection focus is as follows:

Protection means keeping people safe from harm. It aims to ensure that the rights of individuals are upheld by preserving the physical, psychological, and emotional safety, integrity, and dignity of those at risk of, or affected, by violence, discrimination, and exclusion.⁵⁴

Referral: The process of directing a child or family to another service provider because the assistance required is beyond the expertise or scope of work of the current service provider.⁵⁵

Safeguarding: Our responsibility in taking action to: keep people safe from any form of harm caused by the misuse of power by making sure that our staff, volunteers, programmes and communications do no harm to children and adults, nor expose them to abuse or exploitation. Safeguarding also includes protecting staff and volunteers from harm and inappropriate behaviour such as sexual harassment.⁵⁶

Separated children: Children who have been separated from both parents, or from their previous legal or customary primary caregiver, but not necessarily from other relatives. These may, therefore, include children accompanied by other adult family members.⁵⁷

Sexual abuse refers to the actual or threatened physical or psychological intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions. This includes sexual activity with anyone who looks to, or benefits from, RCRC services or programs, or with anyone under 18.

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV): categories that include, but are not limited to, sexual violence, intimate partner violence, trafficking, forced/early marriage, sexual harassment, forced prostitution, femicide, female genital mutilation, sexual exploitation and abuse, and denial of resources, opportunities and services.

Sexual exploitation refers to any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust for sexual purposes, including but not limited to profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another. It includes transactional sex, solicitation of transactional sex and exploitative relationships.

Survivor/victim refers to a person who has experienced sexual exploitation or abuse. The terms 'victim' and 'survivor' can be used interchangeably. 'Victim' is a term often used in the legal and medical sectors. 'Survivor' is the term generally preferred in the psychological and social support sectors because it implies resiliency.

Unaccompanied children: Children, as defined in Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, who have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so.⁵⁸

Violence: the use of force or power, either as an action or omission in any setting, threatened, perceived or actual against oneself, another person, a group, a community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in death, physical injury, psychological or emotional harm, mal- development or deprivation.⁵⁹

54 This definition elaborates on the IFRC's specific focus of implementing the broad definition of protection for all humanitarian actors adopted by the IASC and accepted by the Movement: "all activities aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and the spirit of the relevant bodies of law (i.e. human rights law, international humanitarian law and refugee law)".

55 The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. (2019).

56 The IFRC secretariat further defines safeguarding as aiming to prevent harm in the following areas: i) Sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) of children and adults by anyone working for IFRC or a member National Society; ii) Other forms of abuse e.g. physical, psychological or emotional, financial and/or material, discriminatory, organisational abuse and modern slavery of children and adults by anyone working for IFRC or a member National Society; iii) Harm caused by our programmes and communications that we fund through our partners (including other National Societies, the IFRC and ICRC); iv) Ensuring adults and children of diverse backgrounds have a meaningful role in decisions that affect them and v) Harassment, including sexual harassment, and discrimination in the workplace.

57 The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. (2019).

58 UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), *General comment No. 6 (2005): Treatment of Unaccompanied and Separated Children Outside their Country of Origin*, 1 September 2005, CRC/GC/2005/6, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/42dd174b4.html> [accessed 12 January 2024].

59 From the *IFRC Strategy for Violence Prevention, Mitigation and Response* (based on an earlier WHO definition).

THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

Humanity

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

Impartiality

It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

Neutrality

In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

Independence

The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

Voluntary service

It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

Unity

There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

Universality

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.



The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is the world's largest humanitarian network, with 192 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and around 17 million volunteers. Our volunteers are present in communities before, during and after a crisis or disaster. We work in the most hard to reach and complex settings in the world, saving lives and promoting human dignity. We support communities to become stronger and more resilient places where people can live safe and healthy lives, and have opportunities to thrive.