VAC and Alternative care in refugee settings
Overview of the situation

• An estimated 70 per cent of the refugees are children. As of 15 May 2017, of the total South Sudanese refugee population 1 million are children.

• Of the 1 million children, a total of 75,000 South Sudanese refugee children have been registered as unaccompanied or separated.

• 6,831 Burundi UASC refugee children – total Burundi refugee population is 360,000 out of which 56% are children.

• High mobility of the population

• In camps refugees / urban refugees

• Separation trends:
  • Separation before the fleeing
  • Children became separated during the population movement
  • Intentional separation to access services such as education
  • As a negative coping mechanism e.g. child labour
Alternative care forms for refugee children in the emergency

• Emergency shelters until foster care families are identified

• Family based care arrangements:
  - spontaneous care arrangements (Ethiopia, Uganda)
  - foster family (Rwanda, Kenya, Tanzania)
  - kinship care arrangements
  - customary care arrangements
  - Supported child head household

• Community/Group care
  - Integrated shelter – (Ethiopia(Shire); Uganda)
  - Independent living arrangements

• Institutional care of UASC children is not used as an alternative in the region and not promoted by UNHCR
The process of placement in Family Care Arrangement

• Identification of the child in need of alternative care:
  - Upon arrival in the reception center: registration of UASC and referral to child protection partners (BIA)
  - Once in camp or urban area: through self referral, community, partners - best interest assessment conducted to assess protection risks, tracing needs, etc

• Child counselled on his/her placement

• Identification of foster care givers through community, spontaneous care.

• Social worker assess the foster parents and the care arrangement (interview, home visits) and provide counseling to the foster parents on their role and responsibility

• In some cases placement orders are required

• Support to the foster family

• Monitoring of the care arrangement
Challenges in providing care for refugee children

- Children have experienced traumatic events in their country of origin and during the fleeing
- Overwhelming number of UASC are in need of temporary care arrangements until their family is successfully traced and children can be reunified with them (if in their best interest)
- Identification of foster family in a timely manner
- Refugee families already in a vulnerable situation
- Particular context such as Shire where majority of population is single young males—lack of foster families
- Logistical issue (locating the children in the refugee camps for follow up purposes)
- Limited resources to expedite tracing and reunification of UASC
- National alternative care policies not inclusive of refugee children
What do we know about children in alternative care?

- Often children under foster care are discriminated in the foster family example: being given the domestic tasks, no access to school.
- Some children leave in to reunify with their family without partners/CPC being informed, and disappear.
- When cash grant is provided to foster family it can create tensions.
- No evidence of the violence committed in AC but anecdotal data exists (no evidence of increased exposure to abuse in AC than with biological family).
- Shire example – children in family based care arrangements are found to be less inclined to move onward than those remaining in independent living or community based care—20% of children in AC either delay movement or stay with family.
How to strengthen alternative care in emergency setting?

- Organizing better support for foster families: given the context and their vulnerability, families might not be ready/equipped to receive children having experienced traumatic events
- Involve the refugee community in the identification of foster families
- Need more robust monitoring mechanisms and more capacity to follow up on cases but also to identify and prevent cases of abuse and violence
- Reinforce collaboration between CPC and case workers, networks of foster parents
- Establishment of pre-selected foster care families
Way forward!

• Link with the national child protection system! Increase engagement with the national child protection system to include the particular needs of refugee children in its alternative care policies and regulations

• Identification of foster care family during registration?

• Formalizing foster care? depending on the context, not always appropriate in emergency context

• Emergency foster care system?

• Use of material assistance and livelihood support to support foster families!

• Use of cash support for foster family?