



Child Protection Advocacy Messages for the Ukraine Crisis

April 2022

OVERVIEW

These advocacy messages have been developed to support advocacy efforts conducted by Alliance members and wider humanitarian actors responding to/working on the Ukraine crisis response.

The messages are categorised by issues and themes and include recommendations for donors, humanitarian agencies, humanitarian leadership, as well as the wider international community. They can be used and adapted for both public and private advocacy efforts. Please note that due to the rapidly evolving context, this is a working document that will be updated accordingly and based upon advocacy needs.

We highly welcome your feedback. For more information or to provide us feedback on these messages, please contact: advocacywg@alliancecpha.org

We are witnessing the unfolding of a child protection crisis.

All children in Ukraine are now in **grave danger of physical harm and severe emotional distress**.

Within the first two months of conflict, almost two thirds of children in Ukraine have been displaced, and more than 2 million children have fled across borders. The mass displacement of populations is already resulting in the separation of children from their families. Separated children are amongst the most vulnerable. The absence of care and protection by caregivers and families puts children at an increased risk of harmful child protection outcomes.

All children in Ukraine and those displaced to other countries have **critical child protection needs**, including protection from violence, neglect, exploitation, and abuse. Access to life-saving Child Protection, mental health, and Gender-Based Violence (GBV) services is more critical than ever.

Children's needs must be central to the response and their protection is everybody's responsibility. It is critical to ensure that child protection needs are considered with an age, gender, and disability perspective ensuring strong integration across programmes alongside specialised standalone child protection responses.

CONTENTS

The Centrality of Children and their Protection	2
Children and Armed Conflict	5
Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC)	9
Accountability to Children and Families	12
Localisation	13
Child Protection and Education	13
Child Protection, Food Security, and Nutrition	15
Trafficking	17
Child Protection and GBV	18

THE CENTRALITY OF CHILDREN AND THEIR PROTECTION

Key messages

- **We are witnessing the unfolding of a child protection crisis.** Within the first two months of conflict, almost two thirds of children in Ukraine have been displaced.¹ It is one of the fastest displacements of children since the Second World War. Displaced children are at a higher risk of violence and exploitation, and they are fleeing child-specific forms of persecution.
- **All children in Ukraine are now in grave danger of physical harm and severe emotional distress.** Children, especially those living along contact lines in Eastern Ukraine, have already lived through eight years of conflict, enduring violence, shelling, and being displaced from their homes. Many children in Ukraine have already witnessed or experienced acts of violence, including the sound and shock waves from explosions. Many children are showing signs of significant distress. The threat to their immediate and longer term protection and well-being is of great concern. The absence or loss of a family member also creates considerable psychosocial and socio-economic impacts.
- **The widespread presence of landmines and Explosive Remnants of War (ERW) expose children to the risk of death and horrendous injury.** Eastern Ukraine was already one of the world's most landmine/ERW-contaminated stretches of land even prior to the recent escalation. This reality is rapidly extending to other parts of the country.

¹[Flash Appeal for Ukraine April Revision \(March–August 2022\)](#), UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, April 2022.

- **Airstrikes, shelling, and explosions, particularly the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, have resulted in the damage and disruption of essential services** like schools, hospitals, markets, water and sanitation facilities, energy supply, and other vital infrastructure. **Children face increasing barriers in meeting their basic needs and accessing critical services** such as food, water, transportation, and emergency health care (including medicine).
- **The response has identified major concerns for the care, protection, and safety of unaccompanied and separated children**, particularly those on the move. In addition, incidents of discrimination against certain groups of children, such as children from ethnic minority communities including Roma children, have been noted by frontline responders.
- **We welcome the EU’s efforts to develop, adopt, fund, and implement a protective protection framework that includes key child protection elements** on registration and referral, including for unaccompanied refugee children.²
- **There is an urgent need for strong safety nets to be put in place that includes dedicated capacity within registration systems and specific services for coordinated identification and service provision.** We know from other crises that unaccompanied and separated children are at greater risk of exploitation and abuse, including in the gravest forms. Safety nets will contribute towards protecting children from grave harm, including trafficking risks that preceded the crisis and may be exacerbated by it.
- **Given the worsening situation for children, and the extreme risks they face to their protection and well-being, we welcome the Ukraine Situation Regional Refugee Response Plan March–December 2022, which includes sub-chapters on Child Protection in the regional and country specific chapters. The insufficient inclusion of children and their protection in the March–May 2022 Flash Appeal for Ukraine, and the April 2022 revision, is of concern.** Child Protection is often given limited focus and funding despite the life-saving nature of specialised child protection interventions.³

Recommendations

- **Ensure children are central to the response and that their protection is considered everybody’s responsibility.** It is critical to prioritise evidence generation through the collection of **age, sex, and disability disaggregated data** on children to identify and respond to specific Child Protection needs, ensuring stronger integration across programmes alongside specialised standalone responses.

² On 7 April, the EU Parliament adopted a resolution on [EU Protection of children and young people fleeing the war against Ukraine](#) calling for greater protection of children fleeing war in Ukraine (particularly vulnerable children), for the registration of children entering the EU from institutional care, as well as monitoring their well-being and location in the EU. On 5 April EP adopted a resolution on [Protection of the rights of the child in civil, administrative and family law proceedings](#).

³ Save the Children, The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, Global Child Protection Area of Responsibility, UNHCR, “The Unprotected: Annual Spotlight on Child Protection Funding 2021,” Save the Children, 2022, <https://alliancecpha.org/en/child-protection-online-library/report-unprotected-annual-spotlight-child-protection-funding>.

- **We encourage donors to support the integration of child protection across humanitarian response from the outset**, including in initial needs assessments and in other programmes, including food security, cash and voucher assistance, education, nutrition, WASH, shelter, etc.
- Ensure all humanitarian actors—particularly those who may not have knowledge and/or prior experience in working with conflict-affected populations, including volunteers inside Ukraine and in neighbouring countries—work within **the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action⁴** and **contribute to the Child Protection Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action (CCC)⁵** in their response plans, appeals, and everyday implementation to safeguard and mitigate risks for children.
 - Implementing the Child Protection Minimum Standards (CPMS) and contributing to the Child Protection CCCs increases the quality, coverage, equity, coordination, and accountability of the humanitarian response.
 - For more information and guidance on key child protection needs/risks, priorities, and standards, donors and humanitarian actors can contact Child Protection coordinating bodies, including the Child Protection Area of Responsibility inside Ukraine, UNHCR, and UNICEF in the region.
- **It is critical that children and their protection are given due weight in Appeals and Response Plans and their implementation, both inside Ukraine and across the region.**
 - **Children should be highlighted as a unique affected population group, and child protection risks and existing capacities** should be reflected in the situation analyses, highlighting specific needs by gender, age, and disability.
 - Appeals and response plans should include **standalone chapters or sections on Child Protection** to reflect the specific, significant, and growing protection needs of children and include detailed financial needs and gaps.
 - **Other sectors' analyses and plans should articulate and be informed by the specific needs of children**, disaggregated by age, gender, and disability, to ensure they are integrated into other sectors' plans and response interventions. These sectors should promote child safeguarding and safe risk prevention and mitigation, and ensure response measures appropriate for children.⁶
 - **Donors and humanitarian leadership should promote alignment and adherence to the Centrality of Protection, the CPMS, and the CCCs**, communicating this with other sectoral lead agencies responsible for leading the development of such plans, including OCHA and UNHCR.

⁴ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, “Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action,” The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (2nd Edition), 2019, https://alliancecpha.org/en/CPMS_home.

⁵ United Nation Children’s Fund, “Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action,” UNICEF, 2020, [https://www.unicef.org/media/87611/file/Core%20Commitments%20for%20Children%20\(English\).pdf](https://www.unicef.org/media/87611/file/Core%20Commitments%20for%20Children%20(English).pdf).

⁶ The inclusion of Child Protection within the education sector plan in the flash appeal sets a good example to build on <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Ukraine%20Flash%20Appeal%202022.pdf>.

- Donors should ensure their **calls for proposals and funding criteria require all proposals to be compliant with CPMS. This includes being child-sensitive, gender-sensitive, and disability sensitive.** Wherever feasible, **proposals that prioritise child protection risks, data needs, and interventions within other sectors in line with CPMS Pillar 4, and as a part of multi-sector and integrated programmes, should be encouraged and made a priority.**
- **Supporting specialised, standalone child protection interventions is also critical,** including for case management, particularly registration and referral services, as well as psychosocial support; family tracing and reunification, where in the best interests of the child; and strengthening existing national child protection services.
- Considering the potential long-term impact of this crisis on children and families, **donors should commit to multi-year predictable funding** from the emergency phase onwards. This will better support service continuity and the application of a holistic approach to supporting child well-being and healthy development through child welfare and education systems in host countries and inside Ukraine.
- **Humanitarian and development donors and actors should coordinate their efforts to ensure a nexus approach,** which balances short-term life-saving assistance with longer term support to local actors and government structures, including national child protection systems.
- **Humanitarian funds from any other active crises, particularly those that are already underfunded, should not be diverted to the Ukraine crisis,** and global funding levels should increase to reflect rising needs.

CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT

Key messages

- **Armed conflicts have devastating and long-lasting impacts on children** as they face serious violations of their rights and risk being left without adequate protection and humanitarian assistance. During the course of hostilities, children may witness, experience, or participate in acts of violence or other distressing acts that can affect their physical or psychological well-being.
- **Under International Humanitarian Law, parties to conflict have obligations to protect civilians, including taking all feasible precautions to protect children and civilian objects from attack.** This includes principles of proportionality and distinction with regards to military targets. Children, and critical infrastructure for children, including schools and hospitals, must be protected.

- **The United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution,⁷ mandating the establishment of an independent international commission of inquiry and the subsequent positions⁸ being hired, do not mention or include reference to child-specific expertise.** It will be critical for efforts to be made to ensure sufficient child expertise within these mechanisms and processes to ensure the investigation and prosecution of crimes affecting children.

Killing and maiming of children

- **Children are at increased risk of being killed and maimed, both from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, including those with “wide area effects,” as well as from a large number of landmines, and other explosive ordnance now littered across their communities.** As of 21 April, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has documented 5,264 civilian casualties since 24 February, including 177 children killed (44 girls, 63 boys, 70 unknown) and 285 children injured (61 girls, 66 boys, 158 unknown).⁹ The actual number of casualties is believed to be much higher. According to OHCHR, most of these casualties were the result of explosive weapons with wide area effects, such as shelling from heavy artillery, multi-launch rocket systems, and air strikes.

Sexual violence against children

- **Increasing reports of sexual violence, including rape, sexual abuse, and human trafficking for sexual exploitation allegedly committed against women, adolescent girls, and children, are of deep concern.** Unaccompanied and separated children, especially girls and children with special needs/disability are particularly vulnerable.
- **The disruption of life-saving and basic services as well as overstretching capacities inside Ukraine has weakened essential prevention and response services for sexual violence.** Despite increasing reports, sexual violence in the context of conflicts often goes unreported. In these contexts, access to sexual and reproductive health services can be life-saving and can help avoid long-term consequences.
- **Provision of essential and child-friendly sexual violence services is a non-negotiable responsibility of governments and all humanitarian actors.** In view of the restricted social services and referral pathways in Ukraine, and overstretched capacities in neighbouring countries, protection against sexual violence should be mainstreamed across all response activities in Ukraine and countries hosting refugees.

Risk of recruitment and use by armed forces or armed groups

- **Children in Ukraine and neighbouring countries are exposed to the destructive impacts of armed conflict, including the risk of recruitment and use by armed forces or armed groups.** As the conflict

⁷Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on 4 March 2022 49/1. Situation of human rights in Ukraine stemming from the Russian aggression <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3963815?ln=en>

⁸https://untalent.org/jobs/human-rights-officer-tjo-6-posts?utm_campaign=google_jobs_apply&utm_source=google_jobs_apply&utm_medium=organic

⁹ United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, “Ukraine: civilian casualty update 21 April 2022,” 7 OHCHR, accessed April 25, 2022, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/news/2022/04/ukraine-civilian-casualty-update-21-april-2022>.

continues to expand both in time and in scope, more children are at risk of becoming engaged in the armed conflict through direct involvement in hostilities or by playing a variety of support roles to military operations. **It is essential that children are at all times protected from participation in armed conflict, and from recruitment and use by armed forces or armed groups.**

- **Association with or use by armed actors, and other participation in armed conflict, harms children’s physical health and can result in long-lasting impacts on their mental and psychological well-being.** It can place them at high risk of death or permanent injury as well as capture, detention, or cruel and inhuman treatment, including torture and sexual violence. It also makes family-child separation more likely.
- **Ukraine and Russia have both ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Right of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, in 2005 and 2008 respectively.** The Optional Protocol prohibits conscription of children and their use in hostilities by all armed forces and armed groups. Both Ukraine and Russia have been signatories to the Paris Commitments since 2007.

Attacks against schools and hospitals

- **Attacks on schools and hospitals put children in grave danger and often severely impacts their immediate and longer term protection and well-being.**
 - As of 25 April, **1,499 educational institutions have been damaged or destroyed since 24 February**, according to the Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Science.¹⁰
 - As of 21 April 2022, **WHO has recorded 162 attacks on health care facilities** that have led to 73 deaths and 52 injuries.¹¹
- The Safe Schools Declaration (SSD) and the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict¹² are international standards on the safety of schools, children, and teachers in armed conflict. The Guidelines propose actions for parties in conflict to reduce the military use of schools and universities, and to minimise their negative impact on education.
- **Ukraine endorsed the SSD in November 2019, becoming the 100th country in the world to confirm its political commitment for the protection and continuation of education in times of armed conflict.** The Government of Ukraine has finalised and endorsed the *Safe Schools Declaration Action Plan* and has set up an inter-institutional working group in charge of implementation of the declaration. Since 2019, at

¹⁰ Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Science tracker: <http://saveschools.in.ua/>.

¹¹ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Ukraine: Humanitarian Impact Situation Report,” OCHA, 21 April 2022, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2022-04-21_Ukraine%20SitRep%20Humanitarian%20Impact%20final.pdf.

¹² Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, “The Safe Schools Declaration,” GCPEA, 2022, <https://ssd.protectingeducation.org/>.

least 1,000 military officials¹³ in Ukraine have been trained on the SSD and the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict.

- Russia has not yet endorsed the SSD and the Guidelines, however Russia voted in favour of Security Council Resolution 2601 (2021), which calls on all parties to safeguard, protect, respect, and promote the right to education, including in armed conflict, and reaffirms its contribution to the achievement of peace and security, emphasising the invaluable role that education has for individuals and society, including as life-saving safe spaces. Ukraine was among the 99 UN Member States that co-sponsored the resolution.

Humanitarian access

- **The operational presence of humanitarian organisations continues to be hindered by access and security constraints** and is currently restricted to certain parts of the country, with conflict lines changing daily. **These constraints severely compromise the ability of organisations to reach those most affected.**
- While a few evacuations have been successful, **many have been repeatedly stalled due to continued fighting in the most affected areas,¹⁴ and some civilians, including children, have been killed while trying to flee.¹⁵**

Recommendations

- **Children should be protected from the six grave violations against children as well as other violations of their rights that may be occurring.¹⁶**
- **The international community should ensure those responsible for committing grave violations against children are held to account.** Where safe, relevant, and appropriate, judicial and non-judicial mechanisms should collaborate and share knowledge and expertise relating to crimes against children, including for testimonials and evidence collected from within neighbouring countries.
- **Ensure child-specific expertise is included in international investigative and accountability mechanisms,** including the international commission of inquiry mandated by the UN Human Rights Council and the investigation opened by the International Criminal Court, and for these to carefully consider and take special care to address violations against children.
- **Appropriate systems that are responsive to attacks on schools and protective programming for school communities should be put in place and supported.** This should include support for the monitoring and verified reporting of attacks on educational facilities, students, and personnel. This should also include preparedness and protection measures in case of shelling and airstrikes, explosive ordnance risk

¹³ Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, “Practical Impact of the Safe Schools Declaration,” GCPEA, January 2022, <https://protectingeducation.us2.list-manage.com/track/click?u=4bd5fe1f61eea29e76411b24e&id=ff373af2b8&e=7fe9477a42>.

¹⁴ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Ukraine: Humanitarian Impact Situation Report,” OCHA, 21 April 2022, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2022-04-21_Ukraine%20SitRep%20Humanitarian%20Impact%20final.pdf.

¹⁵ IBID

¹⁶ United Nations, “[The Six Grave Violations – Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict](#),” UN.

education, and strong referral mechanisms to ensure school personnel, students, and families are able to access support as needed.

- **Attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, including schools and hospitals, and the use of explosive weapons in populated areas must cease immediately and be condemned, and the principles of international humanitarian and human rights law must be applied.**
- **Ensure full, unhindered humanitarian access to children and families caught up in the crisis.** Humanitarian access in all conflict-affected areas of Ukraine is essential for assisting and protecting children. Humanitarian aid movement across the “contact line” should be allowed through all entry/exit crossing points to the extent possible.

UNACCOMPANIED AND SEPARATED CHILDREN (UASC)

Key messages

- The significant impact of the conflict on civilian infrastructures and services deeply affects the social and economic stability in Ukraine, putting further strain on vulnerable families and increasing the risk of family separation.
- Mass displacement of populations in areas directly affected by the conflict, both internally and across borders, is already resulting in the separation of children from their families. **Separated and unaccompanied children are amongst the most vulnerable children in humanitarian settings. The absence of care and protection by caregivers and families puts them at increased risk of further harmful child protection outcomes, including all forms of violence, abuse, exploitation, and trafficking.**
- Prior to the conflict, an estimated 100,000 children in 663 institutions, including roughly half with disabilities, lived in residential care and boarding schools in Ukraine.¹⁷ **Deprived of a family environment, these children are highly vulnerable during the conflict.**
- **The vast majority of children in Ukrainian institutions have living parents and families, and contrary to media reports, they are not orphans.**
- **Institutions have been hit by shells and missiles** and accessing appropriate care may become more difficult for children as the violence in Ukraine escalates and food, heating, and access to education and medical care become more challenging, particularly in hard-to-reach areas with high-intensity conflict. It is important to acknowledge the tension between the immediate need to protect children from danger and the potential risk to children that may result from a move to a new location. **As such, the relocation of children from residential care facilities may be considered if they are threatened by the conflict and only accomplished in complete cooperation with the authorities.** Either safe family reunification or

¹⁷ Hope and Homes for Children, “[The Illusion of Protection: An analytical report based on the findings of a comprehensive study of the Child Protection system in Ukraine.](#)” 2016.

arranging for a parent to accompany a child being relocated with a group, where in the best interests of the child, should be considered whenever possible.

- The lack of cross-border registration has made keeping track of the whereabouts of children from institutions who have crossed borders, and ensuring their safety and appropriate care, very challenging. **Many children are travelling with staff from the institutions and therefore are recorded as accompanied by a legal guardian, which can lead to an unclear status with regards to their needs for care and protection.**
- **It is imperative for support to be directed effectively and appropriately under the supervision of the national authorities to prevent abuse, trafficking and other forms of exploitation, separation, and to support families to care for their children under these challenging circumstances.**
- **Private initiatives to facilitate the transfer of children across borders pose serious protection and safeguarding concerns and greatly increases these risks.**

Recommendations

- **Support for an effective, harmonised inter-agency cross-border data management system** should be prioritised in partnership with national authorities responsible for Child Protection. This system should be operational both across Ukraine and in reception countries, and children should be registered before crossing the border with child services maintaining a consistent presence.
- **In most situations, it is in the best interests of the child to remain or to be reunified with their family. Every effort should be made** to keep the children with their families or primary caregivers, as well as siblings, and prevent any (further) separation.
- **Ensure no child is unaccounted for: All children who are separated or unaccompanied, including children who were deprived of parental or family care prior to and during the conflict, should be identified and registered with local child protection authorities. All efforts must be made to initiate immediate family tracing where separation occurs.**
- **Upon arrival in a country of destination, it is essential that all children are registered.** At the point of registration, the identity of the person(s) travelling with the child should be confirmed and contact information recorded. For children travelling alone, or with unrelated adults or friends, a comparison of registrations with existing records of children reported as missing across the EU should be undertaken immediately.
- **Child protection authorities should regularly follow up on all unaccompanied minors as well as children travelling with extended family members and friends,** to screen for potential trafficking and to work towards family reunification where it is in the best interests of the child.
- **Timely interdisciplinary best interest assessment and determination procedures should be conducted in a child-sensitive manner by professionals with relevant expertise.** The views of the child should be taken into consideration and prioritised to ensure children's rights are respected in placement decisions.

- Individual best interest assessments should support their **return home if/when it is deemed safe and in their best interests**. In the meantime, their right to remain in third countries, including their right to seek and receive asylum, should be upheld.
- **Mental health and psychosocial support are vital interventions for children and adolescents affected by conflict, including those who are separated and unaccompanied. Services must be available and accessible. Ensure adequate support for adults (including frontline caregivers) and children**, including the engagement with qualified psychologists, educators, and other service providers. Multisectoral response programming should be in line with the Child Protection, mental health, and psychosocial minimum standards to enhance inclusivity in service delivery.
- **Where alternative care is needed, priority should be given to family-based care.** Support should be provided to enable significant scaling up of family-based alternative care placements where needed, including through funding and sharing of good practices.
- **All efforts should continue to prevent child institutionalisation, including for children with disabilities in Ukraine and in host countries.** The use of residential care¹⁸ should be considered only as a last resort for the shortest possible time, in a setting as close as possible to a family, and centred around the rights and specific needs of the child.
- **Intercountry adoption procedures should not be initiated during or immediately after an emergency.** Separated and unaccompanied children are extremely vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation. The ongoing crisis makes it impossible to ensure that commercial or criminal gain, fraud, child trafficking, and the deception of birth and adoptive parents do not play any part in the adoption process.
- **For the movement of children in residential care across borders, children should stay with caregivers and at minimum, maintain contact with the peers they were living with before fleeing.** The situation and needs of each individual child should be assessed. It is imperative that the movement of children is done in coordination with the relevant authorities and known relatives and registered in key registration and tracing systems, to follow where they are going and who is responsible for their care. There should be a corresponding record in the receiving country.
- **For children who remain in residential care facilities in Ukraine, all efforts should be made to secure and guarantee the supply chains of essential goods** (food, sanitation, hygiene products, and essential medicines) and **critical services** (including those specifically needed for children with disabilities), and that **staffing is secured to ensure consistent care and protection.**

¹⁸ Institutional care is a form of residential care, but not all residential care is institutional. Residential care typically has smaller groups of children and a higher ratio of caregivers. Children in residential care, including group homes, inside Ukraine and Poland are sometimes referred to as foster care homes.

ACCOUNTABILITY TO CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Key messages

- Accountability to affected populations within humanitarian action centres around IASC commitments¹⁹ intended to strengthen the culture of accountability towards delivery of more ethical, principled, and dignified humanitarian response.²⁰ **Accountability to children is a critical component for taking a child rights-based approach.**
- **All humanitarian actors have a duty to children to contribute to their protection, ensuring their safeguarding and protection from sexual abuse and exploitation, and including them within humanitarian accountability and refugee protection procedures. Children must be meaningfully engaged, consulted, and partnered with through age- and development stage- appropriate processes.**

Recommendations

- **All humanitarian organisations must respect the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence.** Donors should ensure all funded programmes adhere to the CPMS and the Core Humanitarian and Sphere standards. This should include strengthening both age- and gender-sensitive accountability and feedback and complaints mechanisms to meet the unresolved challenges and gaps, especially those affecting vulnerable populations. Communities must be at the centre of response plans.
- **Children, including those in host communities, are entitled to child-friendly information about their situation** (age-appropriate, with language they can understand). Early and frequent information about their situation, rights, risks, and available resources should be disseminated widely across different media platforms in different languages, including TV, radio, and social media channels. Where possible, child participatory approaches should be adopted in order to inform the design of child-friendly materials.
- **It is crucial to ensure that child safeguarding policies, procedures, and practices, including for the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) by aid workers and service providers, are employed in all operations.** Child-friendly feedback and complaint mechanisms play a critical role in safeguarding and PSEA and should be adapted to suit children of all ages, genders, and abilities.
- **Donor funding criteria should support the systematic and safe collection of age, sex, and disability disaggregated data.** All data collection exercises should be mindful of the power imbalances that exist across Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), refugees, aid organisations, and border authorities. Strong data

¹⁹ Inter-Agency Standing Committee, “Commitments on Accountability to Affected People and Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse,” IASC Revised AAP Commitments, 2017, <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2020-11/IASC%20Revised%20AAP%20Commitments%20endorsed%20November%202017.pdf>.

²⁰ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, “A Clarion Call: The Centrality of Children and their Protection in Humanitarian Action 2021–2025 Strategy,” 2021, https://alliancecpa.org/en/system/tdf/library/attachments/alliance_2021-2025_strategy_final_en.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=45928.

protections for all data are always essential, particularly for sensitive data related to vulnerable groups of children.

LOCALISATION

Recommendations

- **Donors should provide flexible funding directly to local and national actors to enable them to prioritise the growing and changing needs of the most affected populations. This includes supporting and developing the awareness and capacity of these actors, including on the adherence to and implementation of CPMS.** Support for women and youth-focused and/or led organisations should be prioritised.
- Ensure that local NGOs scaling up their programmes and realigning the focus of their programming to respond to the complex humanitarian situation, both inside Ukraine and in neighbouring countries, **are provided relevant and contextualised capacity strengthening opportunities based upon their specific needs and competencies, to ensure protection outcomes for children are achieved.**

CHILD PROTECTION AND EDUCATION

Key messages

- **During a crisis, a child's right to safe, inclusive, and quality education in a protective environment is ever more important.** Access to quality education enables children and youth to survive and thrive at times of great uncertainty and vulnerability. Quality education that supports socio-emotional and cognitive development bolsters children's resilience amidst adversity. It provides a safe space that can act as a platform for life-saving services and protects them from the violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation that rises precipitously during emergencies.
- **Integrated education and child protection programming is essential in safeguarding children in crisis contexts,** and it is critical in preventing children from dropping out and being exposed to further harm.
- Education is under attack in Ukraine. More than 20 schools a day on average have been attacked across the country since 24 February.²¹ **Access to safe education has been severely disrupted for all 5.7 million children in Ukraine, aged 3–17 years.** This can lead to a significant loss of learning and dropouts.
- At present, despite efforts by the Government of Ukraine and neighbouring countries to ensure children continue learning through online platforms, children are facing numerous challenges to access education,

²¹ Save the Children, "Ukraine: More than 20 Schools Attacked on Average Every Day Since Escalation of War," 2022, <https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/news/media-centre/press-releases/more-than-twenty-schools-attacked-on-average-since-ukraine-conf#:~:text=KYIV%2C%20April%202022%20%2D%20An,Save%20the%20Children%20said%20today.>

including damage or destruction to schools inside Ukraine, displacement, language barriers, special education needs, and a lack of psychological support.

- **There is a shortage of qualified teaching staff and education personnel due to conflict and displacement.** Before the escalation of the crisis in government-controlled areas in the East, approximately 30% (or a total of 200 education facilities) reported that they do not have enough teachers.
- **Children who have fled across borders need support in accessing national education systems, including language and psychosocial support,** and some of these systems have existing challenges, such as teacher shortages and underfunding.

Recommendations

- **The right to education in safe and protective environments must be upheld.** This is only possible by prioritising funding, which enables both the Education and Child Protection sectors to address immediate learning and protection risks in an integrated manner, for those children who remain in Ukraine as well as those displaced beyond its borders. This includes access to extracurricular education for children.

Displaced children need holistic education and child protection support services:

- Efforts must be made by the Ukraine Ministry of Education, as well as hosting national education systems, to **ensure students are able to complete the full academic year (when possible), have access to transition or bridging programmes during displacement as a means of successful integration into local schools, and are provided robust academic and psychosocial support** for the coming years.
- **Transition or bridging programmes should include protective spaces that support formal or non-formal learning,** and it is essential that every step taken by students leads to successful integration into formal education systems wherever possible.
- Safe Spaces and community programming should provide **information on available educational opportunities, in addition to supporting psychosocial, medical/health, and legal services.**
- **Children displaced outside of Ukraine have been offered spaces in local schools, but those schools will need significant support to ensure children are successfully integrated.** This includes language facilitators, MHPSS support to teachers and students, referral mechanisms, etc.
- **Efforts to integrate Ukrainian teachers into host educational systems must be supported** through both advocacy and programming.
- **Resources and support in capacity strengthening opportunities for teachers, volunteers, and administrative staff** of education facilities, including temporary learning centres in areas like **life skills education, Child Protection, emotional support, peace building, and conflict resolution.**

CHILD PROTECTION, FOOD SECURITY, AND NUTRITION

Key messages

- **An estimated six million displaced and conflict-affected people in Ukraine are facing acute levels of food insecurity.** Millions more are projected to fall into emergency levels of hunger and malnutrition. IDP populations and those living in encircled and partially encircled cities, including children, are facing significant shortages of food and water.²²
 - Approximately half of all IDPs are worried about not having enough to eat and are already employing coping strategies such as skipping meals or limiting portion sizes.²³
- **Food security and adequate nutrition is essential to children’s protection, development, and well-being.** Evidence from other humanitarian settings shows that children who do not have access to stable, sufficient, nutritious, and diverse foods report worse mental health, stunting, and psychosocial well-being outcomes and are more vulnerable to neglect, physical and emotional violence, peer violence, sexual exploitation and abuse, sexual violence, child trafficking, and dangers and injuries.²⁴
- **Food insecurity can also force children and families to resort to negative coping mechanisms,** such as family separation, child labour, association with armed forces and armed groups, and other forms of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV). These negative coping mechanisms can exacerbate pre-existing gender and child protection risks. Girls are at increased risk of expulsion from school, early and forced marriages, sexual exploitation to survive, and child and early pregnancy. Girls are particularly vulnerable to forms of SGBV, while boys may be at higher risk of recruitment by armed forces and groups, and forms of child labour.
- **Food insecurity also has negative consequences for the mental health and psychosocial well-being of caregivers, which directly affects caregivers’ ability to care and provide for their children.** In other contexts, food insecurity has been linked to maternal depression, violence against children, increased risk of neglect, and worsened relationships between caregivers and children.²⁵

²² World Food Programme, “Ukraine Conflict: Addressing Acute Needs, Protecting Displaced Populations and Maintaining Food Systems,” WFP, April 2022, https://fscluster.org/sites/default/files/documents/ukraine_crisis_-_wfp_response_strategy.pdf.

²³ World Food Programme, “Ukraine Conflict: Addressing Acute Needs, Protecting Displaced Populations and Maintaining Food Systems,” WFP, April 2022, https://fscluster.org/sites/default/files/documents/ukraine_crisis_-_wfp_response_strategy.pdf.

²⁴ Virginia Morrow, Yisak Tafere, Nardos Chuta, Ina Zharkevich, “‘I started working because I was hungry’: The consequences of food in security for children’s well-being in rural Ethiopia,” *Social Science & Medicine*, Volume 182, 2017, Pages 1-9, ISSN 0277-9536, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0277953617302277>; Catherine Porter et al., “The Evolution of Young People’s Mental Health During COVID-19 and the Role of Food Insecurity: Evidence from a Four Low-and-Middle-Income-Country Cohort Study,” *Public health in practice*, Oxford, England, 3 2022: 100232–100232.

²⁵ Laurenzi, Christina, Sally Field, and Simone Honikman, “Food Insecurity, Maternal Mental Health, and Domestic Violence: A Call for a Syndemic Approach to Research and Interventions,” *Maternal and child health journal* 24.4 (2020): 401–404; Sarah R. Meyer, Elizabeth Meyer, Clare Bangirana, Patrick Onyango Mangan, Lindsay Stark, “Protection and well-being of adolescent refugees in the context of a humanitarian crisis: Perceptions from South Sudanese refugees in Uganda,” *Social Science & Medicine*, Volume 221, 2019, Pages 79-86; Ben Edwards, Matthew Gray, Judith Borja, “The influence of natural disasters on violence, mental health, food insecurity, and stunting in the Philippines: Findings from a nationally representative cohort,” *SSM - Population Health*, Volume 15, 2021, 100825, ISSN 2352-8273.

- **Children have the right to access safe, sufficient, and nutritious food in a protective manner that respects their cultural preferences and developmental requirements.** Children in key phases of development, including **children 6–23 months and adolescent girls and boys**, may require access to specific diets and supplemental foods to ensure their healthy development.

Recommendations

- **Support joint child protection and food security needs assessments** to identify how food insecurity is impacting children’s protection and well-being. When possible, Child Protection and Food Security actors should work together to consult with children, including school-age children and adolescents, to understand children’s coping mechanisms.
- **Monitor how the food security situation is affecting children and family’s coping mechanisms** as the conflict progresses, with particular attention to potential child protection risks, such as psychosocial distress, family separation, sexual exploitation and abuse, trafficking, and child labour.
- **Ensure all distributions of in-kind and cash and voucher food assistance are child-friendly, and mitigate** all associated child protection risks, including sexual exploitation and abuse, physical violence, and family separation.
- **Ensure food security actors, including national partners delivering food assistance, are trained to identify and refer child protection and SGBV risks to relevant actors in a safe and timely manner.**
- Food Security and Child Protection actors must work together to **develop community-based targeting and household vulnerability criteria** to target food assistance, paying attention to particularly vulnerable households, such as child-headed households, single-parent or elderly-headed households, families with children living with disabilities, and children from ethnic minorities.
- **Scale-up national social protection systems to** promote children’s and families’ access to food and prevent child protection risks, such as child labour, sexual exploitation and abuse, and physical and emotional violence against children in the home. Ensure that transfer amounts are sufficient to offset the costs of negative coping mechanisms.
- In areas experiencing acute food insecurity, **it is important to scale-up community-based psychosocial support, with particular attention to supporting caregivers of children and adolescents.** Wherever feasible, integrate positive parenting messages for caregivers into food security and nutrition interventions.
- **Mechanisms must be put in place for the PSEA in all operations, especially in food and non-food items distributions.** This should be a central part of the humanitarian response and must be specially monitored and reinforced in the distribution of all assistance. All actors must protect the population, especially children and adolescent girls, from harm.

TRAFFICKING

Key messages

- While cases of human trafficking are less likely to be identified in the immediate aftermath of mass displacement, **initial reports from within and outside of Ukraine indicate the potential for traffickers to exploit the vulnerabilities of those fleeing the war.**²⁶ Furthermore, Ukraine has a history of trafficking taking place within its borders, with over 1,000 victims of trafficking being identified and assisted by the International Organisation for Migration in 2021.
- **In times of mass displacement, the potential for families and unaccompanied/separated children to become vulnerable to traffickers rises significantly.**
- Border crossing points or reception centres can become very crowded. This can make it **difficult for individuals to distinguish between genuine offers of support and potentially harmful individuals or groups, such as traffickers.**
- Gender inequality is a driver of trafficking and GBV is a means of control across all forms of trafficking, especially sex trafficking. As a result, women and girls are particularly vulnerable to trafficking and sexual exploitation and abuse.

Recommendations

- Support the capacity strengthening of relevant authorities and humanitarian organisations on trafficking and GBV, ensuring safe **identification and referrals to multisectoral gender-sensitive child protection and GBV services.**
- **Ensure that basic needs, especially accommodation and money for food, are met and support services are child-centred and available, to reduce the likelihood that parents/caregivers and children on the move rely on ill-intentioned individuals.**
- **Ensure that comprehensive child-friendly information is disseminated about the risks of trafficking and sexual exploitation and abuse in Ukrainian and other relevant languages.** This must be shared as broadly as possible, both on and offline, taking into account the means to access information for different age groups, levels of digital literacy, and abilities.
- **Governments of Ukraine, refugee host countries, and potential transit routes should reinforce their compliance with the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially women and children.** Particular attention should be placed on the prevention, protection, and providing

²⁶ The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Office of the Special Representative and Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings has issued a set of concrete recommendations for countries to prevent trafficking: <https://www.osce.org/cthb/513784>, 9 March 2022.

appropriate assistance to at-risk groups, as well as investing more in enhancing international cooperation to increase prevention measures.

- **Protection mechanisms for the rapid identification of child victims of trafficking must be prioritised at all border entry points.** In the cases of unaccompanied and separated children, all necessary steps to identify and locate the family should be taken to facilitate a reunion where this is deemed to be in their best interest. In situations where the safe return is not possible, child protection services must establish adequate care arrangements that respect the rights and dignity of the child.
- **Child survivors should be provided with appropriate physical, psychosocial, legal, educational, housing, and health care assistance.** Measures necessary to protect their rights and interests, including protecting their privacy and identity at all stages of criminal proceedings, must be upheld to prevent further harm.

CHILD PROTECTION AND GBV

Key messages

- **The conflict in Ukraine is putting children and young people, particularly girls, at significant risk of SGBV.** Conflicts inflict devastating effects on the progress towards gender equality, protection risks heighten, and social protection services are disrupted. Unaccompanied and separated children, particularly girls and those from ethnic minorities or those who do not speak the language of host countries, are often more vulnerable to risks of GBV, including sexual violence and abuse. It is essential that holistic programmes to prevent and respond to all forms of SGBV are urgently made available to children and families.

Recommendations

- **Funding must be made available for coordinated child protection and GBV risk mitigation, prevention, and response programmes in Ukraine and neighbouring countries. This should include, as a time-sensitive and life-saving intervention, the clinical management of rape.**
- **Special attention must be placed on vulnerable groups:** children and adolescent girls, including those with disability, and unaccompanied and separated children, who in conflicts (and due to the lack of parental care), face heightened GBV risks and other forms of violence, abuse, and discrimination. All procedures must, at any time, take into account the views of the children and girls in accordance with their age and maturity, and in line with their best interest.
- **Multisectoral response programming** should be established regardless of the presence or absence of documented cases of sexual violence or trafficking and **should be in line with the Child Protection and GBV Minimum Standards and Minimum Initial Service Package for Sexual and Reproductive Health in Crisis Situations.**

- **Child Protection and GBV sectors, including through their established coordination mechanisms, must work together effectively to ensure timely and efficient responses that are gender and age responsive, and accessible for all children.**
- **Gender and child protection assessments should be sustained.** These include joint monitoring of risks across Protection Groups and others; secondary data collection/analysis; and ensuring qualitative data collection, storage, and dissemination to inform scaling up gender- and child-sensitive assistance.
- **Invest more in localisation, particularly collaborating with girl and women-led organisations in coordination mechanisms to address GBV.** Tackling GBV in a complex conflict and refugee crisis requires concerted efforts through partnerships that can help to effectively enhance support structures to prevent further harm and trauma and improve access to information on essential GBV services.

Acknowledgements:

These messages have been compiled by The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action's Advocacy Working Group (AWG), in close collaboration with Alliance members, technical Task Forces, Working Groups, including the sub-group on Children's Care co-led by the Global Collaborative Platform and the Unaccompanied and Separated Children Task Force, the Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups Task Force, as well as AWG members and key partners.

© The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action