



CRITICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR
MOVEMENT OF CHILDREN DURING
A HUMANITARIAN CRISIS



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This guidance has been compiled for service providers who are working with children, families, and separated children in response to the current humanitarian situation in Ukraine and surrounding countries.

During a humanitarian crisis, children are at high risk of being separated from their families or caregivers. All measures should be taken to keep children with their families or primary caregivers and prevent any separation. It is important to acknowledge the tension between the immediate need to protect children from danger and the potential emotional harm to children that may result from a move to a new location. This document attempts to summarize key principles and concrete actions that should occur at a minimum when considering the movement of children in families as well as those that are separated. The information is informed by recognized global guidance on the topic. It should not be used in place of such guidance but be used together with existing best practice, guidelines and tools which outline how to move children in an emergency, keeping their rights, safety, and best interests at the forefront.

Throughout the *humanitarian situation in Ukraine and surrounding countries*, service providers will interface with emergency personnel and humanitarian actors who are trained in working with unaccompanied and separated children and will be implementing activities in accordance with international standards and practices. This guidance is designed to support service providers to quickly upskill with information, including principles and key actions, that are required when engaging with children and families and separated children during an emergency.

The guidance contains three parts. **Part I** provides guiding principles that should frame all interventions with children at risk of separation or those already separated from their families during a humanitarian crisis. **Part II** includes key actions when preparing to and moving children. **Part III** includes key actions when receiving individual or groups of children in a new location, including across borders. Links to relevant documentation are included throughout the document to provide additional and more detailed information.





Part I

KEY PRINCIPLES TO GUIDE ALL DECISIONS AND ACTIONS WHEN MOVING CHILDREN DURING AN EMERGENCY

- 1. Do no harm** ensures that all care and transition processes, especially those conducted during an emergency, should aim to prevent harm to children, considering the prevention of abuse and all forms of violence, trauma, and psychological distress.
- 2. The best interest of the child** is placing the wellbeing, rights, and protection of the child at the center of all decisions, processes, and actions.
- 3. The right to life, survival and development of the child** entitles all children, including unaccompanied and separated children, to have their lives protected and for them to grow and develop healthily, including with access to the resources necessary to achieve their maximum human potential.
- 4. Child safeguarding at the forefront of all actions and decisions.** Movement of children, including those with family/caregiver or those that are separated, requires specific safeguarding protocols and practices. Established protocols for their safety before, during and after movement, should be established, understood, and adhered to by all adults moving with, responsible for, receiving and supporting a child. All personnel working in a humanitarian crisis, whether paid or voluntary, must be recruited following safeguarding best practice See [pages 9-15](#) here for child protection risks and responses.

- 5. Adherence to international child rights instruments and good practice** regarding the movement and receiving of children, including unaccompanied and separated children, across borders will be always adhered to. If the child is evacuated across a national border, he/she should be accompanied by a family member (whenever possible) or an adult caregiver that is known to the child.
- 6. Prioritize family-based care for children**, including for those that are separated from parent(s) or caregivers. When **families must be moved**, priority should always be keeping families together. **Family-based alternative care** and eventual reunification with parent/guardian should be prioritized whenever possible and in the best interest of the child. However, proper assessment of alternative families, safeguarding procedures and regular monitoring must also be in place. Short term placements can be expedited in emergency situations, but it is essential that a thorough assessment of the family and plan for the child be developed as soon as possible for the longer term. It is also critical that strong safeguarding policies be in place and implemented in organizations managing placements and frequent monitoring occur. Efforts should be made to maintain communication with parent/guardian to facilitate eventual reunification.
- 7. Non-discrimination** is a child's right to protection regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, ability, or family-status.
- 8. Child participation and agency** is a child's right and good practice. It is the responsibility of adults to inform, prepare, and involve children in the decisions which impact their lives. During an emergency, it is important for children to understand, in age-appropriate language, what is happening, why it is happening, where they are going, and if their family members have been informed. Communication should be on-going and include any changes to the situation or decisions related to the change in location.



Part II

KEY ACTIONS WHEN MOVING CHILDREN FROM ONE COUNTRY TO ANOTHER, INCLUDING CHILDREN FROM RESIDENTIAL CARE, DURING AN EMERGENCY

GENERAL GUIDANCE WHEN MOVING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES FROM ONE COUNTRY TO ANOTHER DURING AN EMERGENCY, INCLUDES:

- **Whenever possible, evacuate children together with adult family members.**
- **Collect, organize, and secure all child and family member's information** (including birth certificates, passports, and other relevant legal documents, reports, photos) in a fire-resistant and water-proof container that can be easily transported. Depending on the contextual arrangement, sharing information with key actors, such as local government or UN agencies, always maintaining confidentiality, might be required. Documentation for children should include sufficient travel documents to enable easy return to the country of origin.
- **Communicate with children.** It is necessary to prepare children for the move in an age-appropriate and child-friendly manner. Focus should be placed on listening to, discussing and addressing their fears and providing enough information that they understand what is happening in age-appropriate language. At a minimum, children need to understand why they are moving and where they are moving. They should also be told if their parent(s)/caregivers have been informed of their move. Encourage children to take a comfort item with them.

- **Ensure all children have identifying information with them.** This should include their name, birthdate, the names, and contact information of their parents/guardian¹ and/or residential care staff, any physical or mental health issues, medication, allergies, or disability, language, and origin of the child. It should be secured to the child and waterproof.
- Children should be prepared ahead of time with information on **what to do should they become separated.** Ideally, the information is shared verbally and printed for them to carry. Please see [here](#), page 35, for guidance.
- Ensure all **children, including those with disabilities, are prepared, supported, and enabled** to move locations. Special planning and accommodations might be required, and this should be part of the planning process. Health care or other services or resources needed for children with disabilities should be arranged and provided for in the new location.
- **Ensure proper safeguarding policies and practices for such circumstances.** All service providers should have existing safeguarding policies and practices. These should form the basis of safeguarding practices during any transition or movement. It is critical to identify, mitigate, and respond to additional safeguarding risks² and places where risks might



1 Throughout this document, parent/guardian refers to the biological parent(s) and guardian refers to someone legally recognized as responsible for the child. Caregiver refers to a residential care staff who might be traveling with the child.

2 These include but are not limited to: risk of separation; risk of violence, abuse, exploitation; risk of sexual exploitation and abuse by caregivers, staff members or others; psychological distress; risk of trafficking; and stigma. See [here](#) for risks before during and after movement of children.

occur when moving children. At a minimum, safeguarding protocols for sleeping, washroom and protocols for children, what to do if separated, and how to report any child protection concern should be established and clearly articulated to all adults, children, and adolescents.

- **Prioritize evacuation to the nearest safe and appropriate place**, ensuring, whenever possible cultural/ linguistic links to facilitate ease of return. Keep children as close as safely possible to their geographical origin and families. For temporary emergency shelter, please see the Alternative Care in Emergency Toolkit [here](#) and minimum standards [here](#), Tool 47. All efforts should be made to provide family-based alternative care for separated children.

IN ADDITION TO THE ABOVE CONSIDERATIONS, THE FOLLOWING SHOULD ALSO BE CONSIDERED FOR SEPARATED CHILDREN, INCLUDING THOSE FROM RESIDENTIAL CARE:

- **Collect, organize, and secure all of the child's information contained in a case file** (including birth certificates or other relevant legal documents, reports, photos) in a fire-resistant and water-proof container that can be easily transported. Ensure that information about their parents/guardians or care leaver is included in the documentation. Depending on the contextual arrangement, sharing information with key actors, such as local government or UN agencies, always maintaining confidentiality, might be required. Documentation for children should include sufficient travel documents to enable easy return to the country of origin.
- **Inform parent or guardian about transition/movement.** In the case that a child has a parent or guardian, the residential care facility must inform parent(s) or guardian in a timely manner **BEFORE** the child is moved to another location. It is important to discuss options for reunification with the family or placement with extended family (kin) in cases where the family does not want the child to relocate, if determined that it is in the child's best interest.
- **Keep siblings together.** All efforts must be made to keep siblings together before, during and after movement from one facility to another.



Part III

KEY ACTIONS WHEN CHILDREN ARRIVE TO ANOTHER COUNTRY

GENERAL GUIDANCE WHEN CHILDREN AND FAMILIES ENTER ANOTHER COUNTRY DURING AN EMERGENCY:

- Agency/organization staff **should meet families or groups at arrival stations** to ensure all family members or groups of children are together. If any child is missing, immediately trigger search for children who may have been separated during the transportation process and inform and liaise with local child protection authorities as well as any child protection in emergency coordinating body (e.g., UNICEF/UNHCR/ICRC).
- **Ask the child to identify who the adult they are traveling with is** and what their relationship is to the child. This is to help prevent and respond to incidents of child trafficking.
- **Welcome the child and their parents or guardian** and explain who you are and for whom you work. In age-appropriate language, explain to the child, where they are, who, where the child is, who the child will be staying with and why the child is there. Also ask the child who the adult they are traveling with is.
- **Ask the child and their parents or guardians to identify if they/someone else they are travelling with have any immediate medical requirements.** Make sure there is medical support available for those with urgent medical needs.
- **Recognize that all children and adults have just experienced a traumatic event.** Speak slowly, reassure them that they are safe, and



determine if any immediate medical or psychological support is needed and, if so, refer immediately.

- **Ensure all children have identifying information with them.** This should include their name, birthdate, the names and contact information of their parents/guardian and residential care staff, any physical or mental health issues health issues, medication, allergies, or disability, language, and origin of the child. It should be secured to the child and waterproof. This information should already be with the child and a copy with the parent or mandated adult caregiver. If it is not, immediately document it on a waterproof card and lanyard and give to the child. The information should also be documented by the receiving agency/individual. Input information into an established **identification and tracking system**.
- **Immediately register children and their family members with local child protection authorities and international organization e.g., UNICEF, UNHCR and/or ICRC, depending on the contextual arrangement.** Information on the child should include the following, at a minimum: name, birthdate, language, place child is coming from, including name of residential care facility, town/region, name and date of birth of sibling if traveling together, names of parent(s)/guardian or caregiver and contact information, if it exists, name and contact information of caregiver with whom they are traveling, any health issue or disability, any regular medication, and place the child will be temporarily residing.
- **Regular and age-appropriate communication with the child(ren).** The receiving agency should make a concerted effort to ease the fears of the child(ren), recognizing that they are in the middle of an extremely traumatic event, and provide enough information that they are not caught unaware. At a minimum, children need to understand why they

were moved, where they are staying, and how long they will be there. They should also be told if their parent(s)/guardian have been informed of their move.

- Ensure all **children, including those with disabilities**, are provided with appropriate health care, or other support in the new location. Special attention should also be paid to their protection and identification of any additional safeguarding issues and protocols or procedures to address them. Coordination mechanisms for referrals should be established ahead of time.
- **Ensure proper safeguarding policies and protocols are in place, and that children and adults are made aware of them.** This should include, at a minimum, protocols for sleeping arrangements, washroom facilities, what to do in case of separation, how to report any safeguarding concerns or other information related to their wellbeing and safety, and engagement with adults other than identified caregiver/caregiver. Children should be made aware of how and to whom to report any safeguarding concern. People often want to help in an emergency, including staff and volunteers. It is critical that Codes of Conducts, safeguarding policies and clear vetting processes are in place to ensure the safety of children. It is important to remember that that not all help is good help.

IN ADDITION TO ALL THE ABOVE CONSIDERATIONS, THE FOLLOWING SHOULD ALSO BE CONSIDERED FOR SEPARATED CHILDREN, INCLUDING THOSE FROM RESIDENTIAL CARE:

- **Inform parent or guardian about the location of the child.** In the case that a child has a parent that is not with them (i.e., is in Ukraine), the agency and/or mandated adult caregiver must inform parent(s) /guardian where the child is and provide contact information, and encourage regular communication with the parent/guardian, whenever possible. If the child is moved to another location, the parent/guardian should be notified immediately.
- **Evaluate, according to information available** on each child's situation, whether family-based care is currently available, safe and **in the best interest of each child. Prioritize where possible, placement in a pre-approved family setting.**
- **Regularly update children's case files** and keep documentation in a secure location. This should include copies of all paperwork, updated contact information, information about changes in the child's health, safety, nutritional or psychosocial needs and development. It should also include any communication with the parent or caregiver.

ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE

The following are links to global guidance outlining work with separated and unaccompanied children during a humanitarian event. All the above are informed by and summarize key points within the documents linked below.

1. [Field Handbook on Unaccompanied and Separated Children](#)
2. [Toolkit on Unaccompanied and Separated Children](#)
3. [Alternative Care in Emergencies Toolkit](#)
4. [Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action](#)

A Checklist to help ensure good practice and child safeguarding during any movement of children in a humanitarian crisis is below. This should be used by all persons engaging directly with children and families who are moving within Ukraine or are arriving into other countries.

ANNEX I: CRITICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR MOVEMENT OF CHILDREN DURING A HUMANITARIAN CRISIS CHECKLIST

DESCRIPTION		NOTES
ACTIONS WHEN MOVING CHILDREN FROM ONE COUNTRY TO ANOTHER		
General guidance		
Children's and family's legal and other documents are secured for safe travel	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Children have been informed of and prepared for the move	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Children have one comfort item with them	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Children have identifying information attached to them	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Children know what to do in case they are separated from family members or caregivers	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Preparations have been made to safely move children with disabilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Children with disabilities have been informed of and prepared for the move	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Identify potential protection and safeguarding risks related to the move (particularly looking at risk of separation/ harassment/ human trafficking, (sexual) abuse, health, and safety)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Identify actions needed to mitigate and respond to protection and safeguarding risks during the move	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Develop a concrete plan for safeguarding children during the move	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Additional guidance for separated children, including children in residential care		
Children's case files are secured for safe travel	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Children's parents/guardians have been informed about the move	<input type="checkbox"/>	
There is a plan for children's care (safe & in the child's best interest) in cases where the parents/caregivers do not want the children to relocate	<input type="checkbox"/>	
All sibling groups are moved together	<input type="checkbox"/>	

DESCRIPTION		NOTES
ACTIONS WHEN CHILDREN ARRIVE TO ANOTHER COUNTRY		
General guidance		
Meet children, families, and groups of children at point of arrival or arrival stations	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Welcome the children, families, and groups of children, introduce yourselves and your organization, and explain where they will be staying and next steps	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Ask children about who the adults are that they are traveling with and what is their relationship to them	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Interact with children and families in a sensitive way, showing empathy and understanding about the difficulties they are experiencing	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Document critical identifying information into a registry, including with international organizations and local child protection authorities, as appropriate	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Observe and interact with the children and families, assessing their immediate need for health, psychosocial or other services	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Refer children to health, psychosocial and other service providers, as needed	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Check with children and families to make sure they have their identifying information with them	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Provide identifying information for children who do not have it	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Input information about children and families into an established, official identification and tracking system	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Regularly communicate with and inform children and families about what is happening and when plans change	<input type="checkbox"/>	

DESCRIPTION		NOTES
Provide appropriate care and support to children with disabilities and their caregivers	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Refer children and their caregivers to service providers in response to immediate and anticipated needs	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Identify potential safeguarding risks related to arrival in the new location	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Identify actions needed to mitigate and respond to safeguarding risks in the new location	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Develop a concrete plan for safeguarding children in the new location	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Ensure children know how and to whom to report safeguarding concerns	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Ensure children know what to do in case they are separated from family members or caregivers in the new location	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Ensure there is a Code of Conduct and vetting process for staff and volunteers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Additional guidance for separated children, including children in residential care		
Ensure children's case files have arrived with the children and are safely secured in the new location	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Keep parents/guardians informed about the location of their children	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Facilitate contact and communication between children and their parents/guardians	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Prioritize placement in a pre-approved family setting when deemed appropriate, safe and in the child's best interest	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Regularly monitor child in placement and update children's case files	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Ensure minimum standards are in place if children are in temporary shelter.	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Changing The Way We CareSM (CTWWC) is implemented by Catholic Relief Services and Maestral International, along with other global, national and local partners working together to change the way we care for children around the world. Our principal global partners are the Better Care Network, Lumos Foundation, and Faith to Action. CTWWC is funded in part by a Global Development Alliance of USAID, the MacArthur Foundation and the GHR Foundation.

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