



# MEASURING SEPARATION IN EMERGENCIES

Concise Pilot Report  
Democratic Republic of Congo

*Population-Based Estimation Method*

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Families are the basic protective unit for children in society, and, in almost all cases, provide the best environment for meeting a child's developmental needs. An unaccompanied<sup>1</sup> or separated<sup>2</sup> child is therefore very vulnerable and at greater risk of violence, abuse, exploitation or neglect. Identifying protective and supportive interim care for a child and carrying out family tracing and reunification activities to get them back to their family as quickly as possible are two of the most significant protective interventions that humanitarian actors can make in an emergency.

The Measuring Separation in Emergencies (MSiE) project is an interagency initiative funded by the USAID Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) and is coordinated by Save the Children in partnership with Columbia University and Johns Hopkins University. Additionally, it is steered by a multi-agency Advisory Panel including members of the Inter Agency Working Group on Unaccompanied and Separated Children (IAWG UASC) and the Assessment and Measurement Task Force (A&MTF) of the Global Child Protection Working Group (CPWG). The overall aim of the MSiE project is to strengthen emergency response programmes for unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) through the development of practical, field-tested tools to enhance the assessment of the scale and nature of separation in emergencies.

Based on extensive desk research and consultation, three methods for measuring separation in emergencies are currently being explored:

1. **Projection method:** This method aims to use existing population data from a given location, combined with empirical data from comparable emergencies, to generate models of UASC risk profiles characteristic of certain emergency types and phases and to test/validate those projections against actual data in existing or evolving emergencies.
2. **Population-based estimation method:** This method aims to provide a population-based estimation of the prevalence, number and basic characteristics of UASC in a defined area, affected by the same emergency, at any given point in time.
3. **Community-based surveillance method:** This method incorporates a community-based surveillance system capable of continuous, ongoing measurement of trends in the frequency and basic characteristics of UASC in defined areas over time.

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<sup>1</sup> **Unaccompanied children** (also referred to as unaccompanied minors) are children, as per the definition in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), 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.

<sup>2</sup> **Separated children** are children, as per the definition in the UNCRC, 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.

This document provides a brief summary of the field testing of the population-based estimation method (or 'estimation method') in North Kivu in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). A fuller account of the field testing can be found in the longer document: *Pilot Summary Report, Democratic Republic of Congo: Population-Based Estimation* by the same authors. The estimation method was used to estimate the scale and basic characteristics of separation resulting from the armed group M23's takeover of Goma in December 2012, also affecting the neighbouring territory of Nyiragongo. The pilot ran from July to August 2014.

Data for this pilot was collected primarily by using a population-based cluster survey tool. A total of 20 sites or 'clusters' (villages and internally displaced persons (IDP) camps) were selected randomly from a list of accessible and secure sites within the areas affected by the emergency (ie, Goma and Nyiragongo). Systematic random sampling was then used to select 25 households to be surveyed within each cluster. Recognising that a 20-cluster, 25-household survey might sometimes be too resource intensive to implement in an emergency setting, a technique known as the neighbourhood method was also piloted. This method facilitates the collection of information on multiple individuals through a single survey by asking survey respondents to also report about their neighbours. In the pilot, a total of 522 primary households were surveyed, including 414 households in villages and 108 households in IDP camps. Each household also reported on the two neighbouring households most proximate to their own. Key informant interviews and focus group discussions with UASC were also used as data collection methods in the pilot to gather qualitative information to inform and add to survey data on separation.

In the sample of 2,197 children living in the respondents' homes at the time of data collection, 8.47% (n=186) were separated children who had newly arrived in the household since the M23 attack. In the sample of 2,034 children living in the respondents' homes prior to the M23 attack, 5.31% (n=108) children had since departed from the household, resulting in separation from their parents or usual caregivers.

The characteristics of arriving children ('arrivals') and departing children ('departures') diverge in a few striking ways. For example, compared to departures, a much larger proportion of arrivals are very young (0–4 years). Also, most arrivals are unintentional separations and at least partially related to the death of parents or family members. In contrast, departures include a higher proportion of older children (15–17 years) and, in many situations, the departure is reportedly part of a deliberate decision-making process.

The situation in camps may deserve special attention, but because we only surveyed 108 households in four camps, it is difficult to draw conclusions from our data. Furthermore, since there is a long 'recall period' between the emergency 'event' being measured (M23 takeover of Goma in December 2012) and the point of data collection (July–August 2014), there is a risk of some imprecision in capturing separation related to the specific emergency 'event'.

In an exercise used to determine whether adults or adolescents were the most reliable survey respondents, ie, better able to report on events primarily in relation to their own household, it was found that overall there was no statistically significant difference between data collected from adults and adolescents in this pilot context.

Other lessons learned as a result of piloting the estimation method in North Kivu, with implications for further field testing and development of this method, include: (1) the need to pilot the estimation method in an acute emergency context with a much shorter recall period; (2) the use of tablets for electronic data collection, given the pressure to produce timely results in an acute emergency setting; (3) a survey powered sufficiently for disaggregation by location/site, for example villages and camps (depending on pilot context); (4) survey respondents report on one neighbour rather than two, to shorten interview time and reduce respondent fatigue; and (5) an additional method to capture the existence and scale of movement of children into residential care settings as a result of the emergency should be considered.

