

## **International protection of children of concern, including education**

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### **1. Features of UNHCR's work in protection children**

- a) operationalizing the “**best interests of the child**” principle
  - cornerstone of the **CRC**
  - and of UNHCR's approach to ensuring proper **decision-making on behalf of children**, and UNHCR as advocate for children
  - ensuring **meaningful participation** of children
  - a **child-centered approach** to protection and finding solutions
- b) **targeted** protection responses and **categories of at-risk children**
  - identification of risks (heightened risk identification tool)
  - categories whose vulnerabilities are exacerbated under certain conditions, like forced displacement
  - tailored assistance and services
- c) principles of **urgency, meaningful participation, AGD, partnership**

### **2. Shift: systems approach to protecting children**

- a) Precisely because every child has **unique characteristics** (capacities and protection needs), providing customized care and support for the millions of boys and girls under UNHCR's care is clearly impossible.

**ExCom Concl. 107** (2007) called for UNHCR to help States fulfill their obligations toward children. UNHCR has therefore been **working toward strengthening national child protection systems**.

UNHCR is now looking to extend the systems approach to protecting children by looking at **different levels of systems** (international, national, sub-national) and less formal systems such as **community level mechanisms**.

## Definition and purpose of systems approach:

- For UNHCR, a systems approach means addressing in a **comprehensive** manner the protection of children, by preventing and responding to threats of violence, exploitation, abuse or neglect.
- This **differs from an issue-specific approach**, as it recognizes the protection needs of all children, at any time; it recognizes that risks may be multiple or change over time and might call for a combination of responses; a systems approach is appropriate in developed and in developing countries, as it builds on existing capacities and legal frameworks.
- There will always be a need for targeted action; a systems approach ensures that **actions are not fragmented**.

## Principles emphasized:

- **State responsibility**
- **Family and community-based approach**

## 3. Intersection of protection strategies

- a) UNHCR's Action against **SGBV**: an updated strategy (June 2010)
  - **recognizes ubiquitous** issues, yet not always included in what should be comprehensive SGBV strategies: protection of girls, boys, adolescents against SGBV
  - identification of children at risk, risk factors for children
  - based on good practices, it suggests systemic preventive measures, and targeted responses
  - child-friendly procedures, SOPs, codes of conduct
  - recognizes negative coping mechanisms and pressures on children to engage in survival sex
  - emphasizes importance of safe environments (live, learn, play)
- b) UNHCR's **Education strategy** (2012-2016)
  - as an **essential tool for protecting children**, both in terms of providing boys, girls and adolescents **safe learning environments**, protecting them from risks of violence, recruitment, SGBV, smuggling,
  - but also in terms of **helping children develop skills, capacity and resilience, preparing them for a future and a durable solution**

to the problems associated with asylum, internal displacement or statelessness.

- Importantly, the education strategy **echoes UNHCR's urban policy** and the **systems approach** to protection by advocating for the **integration of refugee children into national education systems**.
- reestablishing a sense of normalcy, and children's self-esteem, quality education also has a reparative character

### **Target countries:**

- same for CP Framework and for Education: 7 out of 11
- allows **measuring impact of 3 different strategies** where they intersect: protecting children

### **Conclusion:**

Progress can be measured through the sustained implementation of an **AGD** mainstreaming approach to protection and programming, a progressive shift to towards a **systems approach**, and enhancing **knowledge and capacity**.

Strengthened **cooperation with national authorities, communities, and families**

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Enhancing protection through **safe access to quality education** and recognizing how ubiquitous protection issues, such as **SGBV** threaten boys, girls and adolescents.

**The failure of protection can cause irreparable harm to children: a sense of urgency for a comprehensive and predictable response to the needs of all children of concern to UNHCR needs to guide us.**