

International protection of children of concern, including education

(SC, Conference Room Paper 13)

Opening statement by Louise Aubin, Deputy Director
Division of International Protection, UNHCR

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**

+

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.