ARC resource pack

Study material

Critical issue module 6
Separated children

Contents

Implementation strategies: reunification, reintegration and follow-up 44

Training material for this module

Exercises and handouts are also listed at the end of each topic.

When referred to in the text, exercises and handouts are always from the list of training material at the end of the topic where the reference appears, unless the reference specifically points to other topics.

This module is one of the following series of **ARC resource pack** modules.

Foundation modules

1 Understanding childhoods

2 Child rights-based approaches

3 Programme design

4 Participation and inclusion

5 Advocacy

6 Community mobilisation

7 Psychosocial support

Critical issue modules

1 Abuse and exploitation

2 Education

3 Children with disabilities

4 Sexual and reproductive health

5 Landmine awareness

6 Separated children

7 Children associated with armed forces or armed groups

All modules include:

● **study material** giving detailed information on the module's subject and a list of further reading

● **slides** giving key learning points and extracts from the study material, offering a useful resource when introducing training events and exercises

● **training material** for participatory workshops that comprises **exercises** giving practical guidance for facilitators and **handouts** for participants.

The following documents are also included in the ARC resource pack CD-ROM to ensure you can make the most of these modules.

● User guide
An introduction to the ARC resource pack and the relationships between modules.

● Training manual
Advice and ideas for training with ARC resource pack materials.

● Facilitator's toolkit
General guidance on how to be an effective facilitator, with step-by-step introductions to a wide range of training methods.

● Definitions of terms

● Acronyms

See **Guidance for training on critical issues** at the end of this document for further help in developing ARC workshops.

Acknowledgements
The following individuals and organisations contributed to the development of the material in this module.

● IRC

- Save the Children
- ICRC
- UNICEF
- UNHCR
- JRS

Cover photograph

©Save the Children. Chris Stowers. Rustavi, Georgia. PANOS.

Introduction

Facilitators who have not recently trained or worked in the area covered by this module should read carefully through the various topics, exercises, handouts and readings before starting to plan their training activity. Please note that these materials aim to stimulate learning and discussion, and should be used in conjunction with stated policy (they do not replace it). Trainers are encouraged to adapt the module to their specific geographical or cultural context and to supplement topics with their own or locally relevant material.

This **Critical issue** module provides guidance and practical exercises aimed at increasing the ability of staff to respond appropriately and effectively to child separation in an emergency. It is directed at field coordination and senior management level staff who need to have a broad understanding of the range of issues related to separated children, as well as specialised staff who are directly involved in the care of children and in the various activities associated with family tracing and reunification.

Structure and content of the module

The circumstances relating to the separation of children are very different in different contexts and cannot be addressed through one approach or model. No single model can either explain all the factors, or outline a uniform procedure that will deal with child separation. This is dependent upon an understanding of the local context, and the resources available to protect children and secure their wellbeing. Throughout this resource pack the importance of situation analysis is emphasised; this may need to be repeated or updated in rapidly changing circumstances. The situation analysis should include a risk analysis, and a gender analysis is essential to ensure girls are not at risk of being invisible.

The table below outlines the structure and content of this module and also provides references to the **Foundation** modules relevant to each topic.

Topic	Subject matter	Relevant Foundation modules
Topic 1	**The issue for children**	
	This topic discusses the causes and impact that separation has on children. Separation can be accidental and involuntarily, deliberate or agency-induced. The impact of separation is described on the levels of developmental and emotional impact and identifies further risks related to vulnerability to abuse and exploitation.	Understanding childhoods Child rights-based approaches Programme design Participation and inclusion Advocacy
Topic 2	**The law and child rights**	
	A rights-based approach: legal and normative framework relating to the separation of children.	Child rights-based approaches Advocacy
	This topic introduces the legal framework and the rights of separated children, and discusses	

the duty bearers and their responsibilities as well as the mechanisms in place for children, adolescents and children with their parents to facilitate claiming their rights.

Topic 3	**Assessment and situation analysis**	
	Understanding the reasons for separation. Looks specifically at the importance of using the child rights situation analysis. It is an essential starting point for understanding:	Programme design Participation and inclusion

● which groups of children in different areas and situations are denied their rights

● who is responsible for delivering on their rights

● why they are unable or unwilling to do so.

This topic underlines the importance of situation analysis in order to understand the precise interplay of factors in any situation and develop prevention strategies which respond to these. Child rights situation analysis (CRSA), which should be used where possible, is introduced in this topic.

Topic 4	**Planning and implementation**	
	Programme implementation: prevention and response	
	This topic underlines the importance of collaboration, cooperation and complementarity between all actors and outlines the different levels of implementation: advocacy, capacity building and direct service delivery.	Understanding childhoods Child rights-based approaches Programme design Participation and inclusion Advocacy Community mobilisation Psychosocial support

Specifically it looks at strategies for:

1 preventing and reducing separation

2 responding to separation

3 interim care and psychosocial support

4 advocacy.

Implementation strategies: reunification, reintegration and follow-up

This topic looks at the importance of building a protective environment and developing the capacity to protect separated children and highlights the importance of a realistic assessment of gaps in capacity at all levels (community, local government, national government) in order to inform a strategic and collaborative approach to building capacity to protect children.

Topic 5	**Monitoring, evaluation and learning**	
	This topic outlines the need for programmes working with separated children to ensure they have the capacity for monitoring in the following areas:	Child rights-based approaches Programme design Participation and inclusion Community mobilisation

● the wellbeing of children following their reintegration into family and/or community

● monitoring and evaluation of programmes (M&E)

● monitoring and reporting of human rights violations.

The dynamic nature of monitoring is highlighted and the range of purposes for ways in which monitoring is used.

This module draws extensively on a number of key documents which should be referred to in full for those requiring a more detailed understanding of the separation of children. These documents are listed in the reading list at the end of the module.

The importance of the UN Convention on the rights of the child

The human rights of children are fully articulated in one treaty: the UN Convention on the rights of the child (CRC 1989), offering the highest standard of protection and assistance for children under any international instrument. The approach of the CRC is holistic, which means that the rights are indivisible and interrelated, and that all articles are equally important.

Definitions of terms

In an emergency, children may become lost or otherwise separated from one or more parent(s) or caregiver(s) and other relatives. Because children's status in conflict situations is seldom immediately clear, they are referred to as **separated** or **unaccompanied children** rather than orphans. In many natural disasters, however, orphanhood may be determined sooner, allowing workers to shift from tracing and reunification efforts to finding appropriate long term care arrangements.

Those working with separated children must become familiar with these terms and be able to explain them to the local population in a way that will have meaning for them. They will be used to identify and register children who are most at risk so that immediate action for their protection can be taken, based upon best practices as reflected in this training.

The following definitions, from the *Interagency guiding principles on unaccompanied and separated children*, are used within the context of an emergency to describe children who have been lost or otherwise separated from their families.

● **Child** refers to any person less than 18 years of age in accordance with the CRC.

● **Separated children** refers to children who are separated from both parents, or from their previous legal or customary primary caregiver,[1] but not necessarily from other relatives. These may, therefore, include children accompanied by other adult family members.

- **Unaccompanied children (also called unaccompanied minors)** refers to children 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. *This means that a child may be completely without adult care, or may be cared for by someone not related or known to the child, or not their usual caregiver eg. a neighbour, another child under 18, or a stranger*. This may well include children in institutions.

- **Orphans** refers to children, whose parents are both known to be dead. In some countries, however, a child who has lost one parent is called an orphan.

- **Children in child-headed households (CHH)** refers to children under the age of 18, living in a group with other children. CHH are not referenced in the IASC guidelines. However, they are common within emergencies and worthy of mention in this module.

While these definitions are universally understood among field workers, it is important to note that different terms are often used in different languages and cultures. For example, the term **orphan** can variously imply the loss of mother, father, or both. Similarly, the term separated child may, in some cultures, imply separation from father but not mother.

Topic 1
The issue for children

Key learning points

- There is an important distinction between **separated** and **unaccompanied** children but both are likely to require family tracing and support.

- Children can become separated in a number of ways, some of which are accidental and some of which are deliberate.

- Separation is a devastating experience for children in situations of conflict and displacement and can have serious long-term consequences on a child's wellbeing.

- Separated children may be at greatly increased risk of abuse, exploitation, and of recruitment into armed forces or groups.

- Separation can affect differently girls and boys according to different ages, background, coping mechanisms or personal resilience.

  *'Under some customary care practices a wide range of family and clan members have responsibility for a child. Many communities, therefore, do not consider that a child living with extended family is **separated**.'*

All unaccompanied and separated children are entitled to international protection under a broad range of international and regional instruments. All such children require priority action by all concerned organisations, including early identification, special protection and provision of care arrangements, as well as family tracing with a view to their reunification with parents or other traditional caregivers.

Causes of separation

Before, during and after an emergency, children may become separated from their families or adult next-of-kin in a variety of ways. Some of these children will additionally become unaccompanied. The risk of separations occurring is likely to increase during large and chaotic population movements, particularly where there is, or people think there is, a threat to life. Understanding the reasons for separation is essential to guide actions on behalf of unaccompanied children, both individually and collectively.

'During the guerrilla offensive in 1989 we fled from our house with my parents and all my brothers. We went to the bus terminal (in San Salvador) to take the bus to Guatemala and there was an incredible hustle. It was there (in the midst of the confusion) that we lost the girl, my youngest sister, while we were putting our suitcases on the bus. We looked for her, but we couldn't find her.' [2]

Accidental and involuntary separations

Accidental and involuntary separations are not planned or anticipated. This type of separation may be particularly traumatic for a child as he or she may simply not understand what is happening. Examples of accidental separation may include the following.

- Children are lost and/or flee during an attack, or they are lost during the chaos of flight, repatriation, or a trip to a safer place.

- Children are away from home, at school, with friends, at work, when families are suddenly forced to flee or displaced by a natural disaster.

- Family members responsible for a child are injured, killed, captured, kidnapped, abducted or detained.

- Children are abducted for various reasons, including but not limited to ransom, trafficking, military conscription, and labour.

- Children with disabilities are unable to keep up with other members of the family and are subsequently left behind.

- Potentially separated children are taken to institutions by police or citizens who do not properly seek out information on their circumstances beforehand.

- Children left briefly unattended while parents go in search of food or water, wander off.

- Aid agencies inadvertently cause separation through inappropriate interventions.

'A UNICEF study of street children in Khartoum[3] found that most were young male southerners, many of whom had opted to leave their families in the south in the hope of bettering themselves.'

Deliberate separations

Deliberate separations occur when parents, caregivers or children themselves make a conscious decision to separate. These decisions may arise out of dire poverty, insecurity, or other reasons. It may be that parents or caregivers had an opportunity to explain to the child reasons for the separation before it happened, but the impact of separation on the child is still likely to have been very distressing. Examples of deliberate separation can include the following.

- Children are abandoned, due to financial, social, and physical stress in the family. Abandonment can happen prior to or during flight, often by parents who feel they are unable to care for or protect a child and sometimes by foster families (children of a different ethnic group from that of their caregivers might be especially vulnerable).

- Children are relocated or sent by families to stay with relatives or friends in third countries.

- Children self-separate or choose to leave their families due to conflict or abuse in the household or due to a desire to live independently with the consent of their parents.

- Families hand responsibility for children to neighbours, residential or institutional care centres, or aid workers, for what is initially thought to be a temporary period.

- Children are placed in orphanages or other institutions by parents hoping to give them access to more services and a better life.

- Children are 'voluntarily' recruited into armed forces and groups. It should be noted that the conditions under which a child might 'volunteer' to join an armed force usually involve some form of coercion.

- Children are evacuated for medical or other reasons.

- Children are sent to attend boarding schools or, in Islamic communities, to Islamic schools.

● Children are separated due to traditional or cultural practices. For example, children in Sudan may be sent to cattle camps for up to three to four years.

Agency-induced separations

As mentioned previously, agencies themselves may be responsible for causing both accidental and deliberate separations by not attaching sufficient importance to family unity. Examples of circumstances under which agencies might contribute to separation can include:

● Badly organised population movements, including the evacuation of children without proper guidelines

● Inadequate record keeping by agencies providing emergency assistance

● The removal of unaccompanied children from situations without adequately investigating their circumstances or keeping records

● The admission of children to residential centres without following proper procedures for documentation or without attempting to communicate with authorised professional childcare agencies

● Fostering or adoption that does not follow guidelines

● Healthcare programmes that inadvertently separate parents and children during treatment and hospital admissions

● Programmes that offer incentives to separated children and their families, thereby encouraging separation

Impact of separation

Separation from family members in an emergency is a highly distressing event, which can have a profound effect on the developing child, both in the short term and in the long term. Without the physical protection and emotional support from their parents or usual caregivers, separated children are also more vulnerable to abuse, exploitation, and psychosocial problems.

Developmental impact

Across countries, there are significant cultural variations on how children are reared, reflecting different patterns of childcare and different ways in which children become attached to their families. The impact of separation on a child depends heavily on these factors, as well as a child's age, level of intellectual development, emotional maturity, and level of personal resilience. The nature and duration of a separation, and how rapidly appropriate care and opportunities for developmental activities are provided, will also have a significant effect on how a child deals with separation.

Research evidence suggests that the period from birth to about three years, (and especially the period between four months to three years) is particularly important for the formation of bonds and the development of attachment behaviour, and that separation during this period has the greatest distress reaction. Young children may have a very limited sense of time, meaning that a separated child will have no concept of interim care lasting only a few days, weeks or months. It is not unusual for young children to regress to baby behaviour during separation. They may be more fearful at

night, speak less clearly, refuse food, become more fearful of strangers, and relinquish bladder and bowel control.

School-aged children also have reactions that often exhibit themselves as negative behaviours. Denial, depression, increased aggression, sleep disturbances and/or physical symptoms, such as headaches, stomach-aches and shortness of breath, are all common reactions among school-aged children, particularly when a separation is prolonged. Adolescents tend to have a greater control over grief and have acquired cognitive capacities to understand more about what is happening to them. There is, however, some evidence that separation during adolescence has a more profound long-term effect than separation experienced by younger children. One of the reasons for this may be that separation can disrupt the young person's sense of self and her or his emerging sense of identity.

Emotional impact

Separation does not occur in isolation from other events. A separated child may have witnessed frightening and violent events, and may have experienced loss of parents and family, of home, relatives, friends, school and the security that comes from a familiar environment. Many are suffering the shock of dislocation from their family and environment, and a great deal of depression and despair.

Separated children may be exhausted and overwhelmed by the practicalities of fleeing their homes and arriving in an unfamiliar location and/or alien culture, particularly when they are unable to speak the language or express their views. They are also likely to be anxious about what has happened to family members and what will happen to them, especially in situations of armed conflict or other disasters, where the very survival of unaccompanied and separated children is often threatened.

The emotional toll that separation takes on a child can be devastating. Those working with separated children must ensure that these pressures are not further exacerbated by poorly planned interventions or insensitive practices. Examples of actions that might increase fear and anxiety among separated children include:

- registration interviews conducted by poorly trained people who inappropriately pressure children to disclose distressing events, leaving them even more distressed

- medical examinations conducted without prior information or consent from the child

- the movement of separated children to different locations and placements without prior explanation or preparation.

Further risks: vulnerability to abuse and exploitation

Separated children are, by the very nature of being separated, extremely vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Principally, these children are without adult protection. There is no one to send them into safety and, at a physical level, they cannot resist as well as adults. Not only are they deprived of the care normally provided by parents or other customary caregivers, but separation often implies that they are forced to fend for themselves. Without early identification, care and protection, they can experience an accumulation of risks, including but not limited to:

- neglect and abuse, for example, sexual abuse and other forms of gender-based violence

- military recruitment

- child labour, for example, forced labour for foster families

- detention

- trafficking

- discrimination and denial of access to food, shelter, housing, health services and education

- injury and illness, including HIV

- deprivation of emotional support.

Separated children need attention and their care must be monitored closely to ensure that they do not suffer from abuse or exploitation. Even during interim care, the possibility of abuse and/or exploitation is an ever-present reality, and adequate monitoring and follow-up must be provided. Experience has shown that children who are not biological children of the family are often not treated in the same way as the biological children. They are sometimes the ones who are assigned the household chores and other tasks, such as fetching water and firewood, herding cattle or looking after younger children, tasks which could result in not attending school or being exposed to protection risks (see **Foundation module 7** Psychosocial support).

'When appropriate in a particular situation, special measures must be taken to protect children, in particular girls, from rape and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence, particularly in situations of armed conflict.' [4]

Usually, though not always, the closer the kinship between adult and child, the more protected a child is. Thus, children living with less closely related adults, including unaccompanied children and children in child-headed households, tend to be the most vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Girls are more at risk of abuse and neglect, whether they are with close relatives or not, particularly with regards to sexual abuse. As a rule, these children require the most attention and monitoring, because they are more at risk.

Training material for this topic

Exercise 1   Definitions and terminology

Exercise 2   The case of Kollie

Handout 1   Case study

Topic 2
The law and child rights

Key learning points

● Programmes for separated children should have a clear child rights focus, in keeping with the provisions of the CRC and other international, regional and national instruments.

● Separated children, whether refugees, internally displaced or a survivor of a natural disaster, have specific rights under international law.

● States, specific organisations and other bodies are responsible for protecting children's rights.

Rights-based approach

All children have the right to protection, care and development under several national, regional and international instruments. The family environment is seen as an important factor in the enjoyment of these rights. Direction and guidance needs to be provided by the family environment, in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child (CRC Article 5). Separated children are highly vulnerable to having their legal rights violated since they are without the protection of their families or legal guardians. Separated children who are internally displaced, refugees or survivors of disaster face additional risks. This topic provides a summary of the key legal instruments which relate to separated children, including those who are refugees or internally displaced.

A rights-based approach to working with separated children requires that programmes:

● Ensure that children affected by separation are involved in planning, implementing and evaluating the effectiveness of the programmes

● Ensure long-term goals with a clear focus on separated children and their rights through problem analysis, causes and responsibilities at local, national and international levels

● Actively seek out those who might otherwise be marginalised (by ethnicity, sexual orientation, religious orientation, age, gender, HIV and AIDs positive, refugees or IDPs and disabilities) and find ways to ensure that their voices are listened to in these processes

● Identify those who should be responsible for respecting, protecting, and fulfilling the right of the children affected by the separation, and working with them so that they can and do act on these responsibilities

● Strengthen the accountability of duty bearers for children rights at all levels through a combination of direct action, changes in laws, policies and resource allocations, changes in institutional rules and practices and changing attitudes and behaviours

● Support rights holders (separated children, adults and civil society institutions) to demand their rights

Relevant legal instruments

The CRC

A rights-based approach emphasises the four guiding principles of the CRC:

- non-discrimination

- adherence to the best interests of the child

- the right to life, survival and development

- the right to participate.

They represent the underlying requirements for any and all rights to be realised. In addition, several articles within the CRC make specific reference to a child's right to live with his or her family, and how to protect a child separated from family.

CRC articles of relevance to separated children[5]

Preamble Convinced that the family, as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and wellbeing of all its members and particularly children, should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community…

Article 3 **Best interests of the child** All actions concerning the child shall take full account of his or her best interests. The State shall provide the child with adequate care when parents, or others charged with that responsibility, fail to do so.

Article 7 **Name and nationality** The child has the right to a name at birth and birth registration. The child also has the right to acquire a nationality and, as far as possible, to know his or her parents and be cared for by them.

Article 8 **Preservation of identity** The State has an obligation to protect, and if necessary, re-establish basic aspects of the child's identity. This includes name, nationality, and family ties.

Article 9 **Separation from parents** The child has a right to live with his or her parents unless this is deemed incompatible with the child's best interests. The child also has the right to maintain contact with both parents if separated from one or both.

Article 10 **Family reunification** Children and their parents have the right to leave any country and to enter their own for purposes of reunion or the maintenance of the child-parent relationship.

Article 12 **The child's opinion** The child has the right to express his or her opinion freely and to have that opinion taken into account in any matter or procedure affecting the child.

Article 19 **Protection from abuse and neglect** The State shall protect the child from all forms of maltreatment by parents or others responsible for the care of the child and establish appropriate social programmes for the prevention of abuse and the treatment of victims.

Article 20 **Protection of a child without family** The State is obliged to provide

---

special protection for a child deprived of the family environment and to ensure that appropriate alternative family care or institutional placement is available in such cases. Efforts to meet this obligation shall pay due regard to the child's cultural background.

Article 21 **Adoption** In countries where adoption is recognised and/or allowed, it shall only be carried out in the best interests of the child, and then only with the authorisation of competent authorities, and safeguards for the child.

Article 22 **Refugee children** Special protection shall be granted to a refugee child or to a child seeking refugee status. It is the State's obligation to cooperate with competent organisations which provide such protection and assistance.

Article 25 **Periodic review of placement** A child who is placed by the State for reasons of care, protection, or treatment is entitled to have that placement evaluated regularly.

Article 35 **Sale, trafficking and abduction** It is the State's obligation to make every effort to prevent the sale, trafficking, and abduction of children.

Article 37 **Torture, degrading treatment and deprivation of liberty** Children, including refugee and asylum-seeking children should not be detained. In situations where they are detained, this detention must be a measure of last resort and should be for the shortest period of time.

International refugee law

Children recognised as refugees are additionally protected by international refugee law: the 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees and its 1967 protocol set standards that apply to children in the same way as to adults. At a regional level additional protection is provided under the 1969 Organisation of African Unity (OAU) Convention governing the specific aspects of refugee problems in Africa and the 1984 Cartagena declaration (non-binding). While the CRC is not a refugee treaty, refugee and asylum-seeking children are covered by the provisions of the convention as all rights mentioned in the CRC are granted to all persons under the age of 18 years (CRC Article 1) without discrimination of any kind (CRC Article 2).

International and national laws protecting internally displaced persons

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) are those who remain within their national borders and are therefore the primary responsibility of their own government. Children who are internally displaced are subject to national law and applicable international laws, for example, ratified by their country of citizenship and customary law. The *Guiding principles on internal displacement* (1998) are derived from law but are not legally binding unless the country has made of them a national law.[6] They consolidate into one document the relevant rights and obligations applicable to IDPs, including rights specifically applicable to displaced children, for example: protection from forced recruitment and child labour, right to an education, importance of staying with family and/or being reunited. The basic principle for the protection of IDPs is that they are entitled to the same protection as the rest of the nationals of the country.

Other legal instruments

Other relevant instruments that complement the CRC's protection for separated children include: the Optional protocol to the CRC on the involvement of children in armed conflict, 2000; the Convention on protection of children and cooperation in respect of inter-country adoption; the four Geneva conventions of 1949 and their additional protocols of 1977.

Agency policies: best interest determination

Several UN agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have developed their own policies to protect the rights of separated children. UNHCR recently developed *Guidelines for the formal determination of best interests of the child* (BID) to help identify best interests of a child in particular situations and ensure compliance with the CRC.

Procedures for BIDs are generally put in place for cases that require **higher procedural safeguards** to ensure that additional attention is given to determining a child's best interests. Cases requiring **higher procedural safeguards** include those that demonstrate all of the following conditions.

1 Parental absence, refusal, or inability to exercise basic parental responsibilities.

2 A decision which fundamentally impacts the future of the child.

3 The need for a complex balancing of factors and rights in determining the best interests of the child in the individual case.

On the basis of the three criteria listed above, the following three situations have been identified as those in which a formal BID is required for children of concern to UNHCR:

● to identify durable solutions for unaccompanied and separated refugee or internally displaced children

● to decide on temporary care arrangements for unaccompanied and separated children in particularly complex situations

● to decide on the separation of a child from his or her parents against their will.

There may be other situations, however, in which the BID may be a useful protection tool, depending on the national context or the individual case at stake.

BIDs require the involvement of more than one person, and documentation of each step of the process. They are a means of ensuring that special protection and assistance are afforded to children who are or may be without a family. They are necessary in ensuring that all facts and rights are considered when a decision which has a fundamental long-term impact on a child is taken.

In determining best interests, it should be also noted that the CRC stipulates best interests as a primary, but not sole consideration. In other words, once the best interests of a child are determined, other considerations need to be taken into account. These additional considerations, if they are rights based, may, on rare occasions, override best interests considerations. Examples of cases in which this might occur include situations in which the child constitutes a serious risk to the physical safety of others, whether due to violent behaviour, health circumstances that might put the receiving family at risk, or other issues. In all such cases, careful analysis and documentation must be carried out.

Stakeholders and duty bearers

While parents, families, and communities have a primary responsibility, it is the State, through the national and local authorities, who has ultimate responsibility for ensuring that children's rights are respected and fulfilled.

However, in many situations of emergency and/or instability, governments that are overwhelmed, resource lacking, or besieged may not be in a position to support parents in their responsibilities or give assistance to the most vulnerable, particularly separated children. In these cases, the protection of separated children often falls under the mantle of the international humanitarian community, including UN bodies, NGOs, and other international humanitarian organisations. A child rights situation analysis is essential for understanding roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders; and assessing their capacity (or lack of it) to deliver on their responsibilities.

In the harsh reality of many emergency situations these organisations, however, cannot act alone in taking important decisions about separated children in a given country. Wherever possible, they must work closely with governments, no matter how fragile, unable or unwilling they may be, as States have the ultimate responsibility for ensuring the protection of their citizens and others within their territory. In most cases, government representatives head a coordination body, with technical support from a UN organisation. In a refugee setting, the UN body responsible is UNHCR. In major emergencies where the cluster approach is triggered, coordination for issues pertaining to separated children falls under the protection cluster, often within a sub-working group or sub cluster on child protection.

● **UNHCR** is mandated to lead and coordinate international action for the worldwide protection of refugees, including refugee children, and the resolution of refugee problems.

● **UNICEF** One of UNICEF's core commitments in emergencies and child protection is preventing the separation of children from their caregivers, facilitating their identification and registration, and ensuring access to adequate care, particularly for those under five years of age and adolescent girls.

● **ICRC** The International Committee of the Red Cross central tracing agency coordinates activities related to restoring family links, reuniting families and searching for missing persons, particularly across border, conducted at the field level by the international network of Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, and other operational child protection NGOs.

● **National NGOs** play a key role in the implementation of care, tracing, and family reunification programming for separated children bringing particularly valuable national knowledge and resources to all processes.

● **International NGOs** (such as the International Rescue Committee and Save the Children, both members of the Inter-agency Working Group on Unaccompanied and Separated Children), play a key role in the implementation of care, tracing, and family reunification programming for separated children.

No single agency has been delegated full responsibility for IDPs. Instead, guided by a rights-based approach, the Inter-agency Standing Committee (IASC) has adopted a **collaborative approach** to IDPs, whereby a broad range of humanitarian and development actors are called upon to respond to the needs of IDPs. The UN

Emergency Relief Coordinator is responsible for overseeing this coordination. Again in major emergencies in which there is substantial internal displacement, a protection cluster will probably be convened and led by UNHCR or in natural disaster situations by UNICEF or OHCHR.

Training material for this topic

Exercise 1	A protection framework for separated children
Exercise 2	Using the CRC to guide decision making
Handout 1	Case study from eastern Europe
Handout 2	Case study

Topic 3
Assessment and situation analysis

Key learning points

- Child separation occurs in all emergencies and needs should be assessed and analysed prior to intervention.

- Community and children's participation should be taken into consideration in any assessment at the earliest possible time.

- Multidisciplinary assessments are needed in all stages of the emergency and beforehand if possible.

- Analysis of the collected data is a natural part of the assessment that should evaluate consequences of potential interventions or lack of intervention.

Assessment

For more information on situation analysis as it relates to children conducting assessments, see **Foundation module 3** Programme design.

Assessments are useful in identifying the main causes of separation, current care arrangements or lack thereof, taking into account existing traditional care systems and arrangements, and specific protection issues that separated children may face. Assessments should be carried out with the active involvement of those affected, at the earliest possible stage of an emergency as part of a broader situation analysis in order to develop an appropriate response. As such, they can be carried out:

- **prior to the likely onset of an emergency** in an effort to identify locations which are likely to be affected and possible patterns of displacement. Information collected can then be used to prepare a plan for minimising the risks of separation.

- **during and after the onset of an emergency** to identify and analyse the geographical spread and locations of separation, the extent and principal causes of family separation, and existing methods of caring for separated children at the local level. Assessment during the emergency phase will be different depending on the moment. In cases of outbreak of violence or natural disaster the first 48 hours are critical to prevent separation and assessments must be conducted immediately to respond rapidly. The critical period will continue for at least two weeks immediately after the emergency.

Assessments should be carried out by a multi-disciplinary team trained to work with children and conversant on issues related to separated children in emergencies, knowledgeable about the local historical, social, and political environment, and thoroughly briefed on separated children's issues in the region. The assessment should also include the active participation of members of the affected community, including national and/or refugee staff members, some of whom may have lost child relatives in the emergency; others who may be caring for separated children and other children. Careful judgment must, however, be exercised in the choice of both local team members and participants, particularly in highly politicised settings in which some individuals may seek to use the assessment to pursue their own agenda.

All assessments should include the following general components.

● An analysis of the political and socioeconomic causes of separation.

● A review of the policies of all national and local governments pertaining to separated and orphaned children.

● A study of the community's customary attitudes and practices towards orphaned or otherwise separated children, including an analysis of measures taken by the community towards orphaned or separated children even prior to the emergency, and the community's resources to do more.

● The estimated number of separated children in various locations, disaggregated by age, sex and situation, including particular risk factors such as children with disabilities, children associated with armed forces or armed groups, those in child-headed households, and street children, as well as factors that could potentially cause new separations or aggravate the circumstances of children already separated in these areas.

In the field, methods should include direct observation, interviews and focus groups with a broad range of key community informants and leaders taking into account age, gender and diversity. These can include but not be limited to: religious leaders, women's groups, local and national authorities, teachers, law enforcement officials, soldiers, local and international NGOs, and children themselves. Tactics should also include visits to orphanages, to find out if there have been any new admissions since the beginning of the emergency and private discussions with separated children. Efforts to sensitise the community, authorities, NGOs and others regarding issues related to separated children are also essential.

It is important that messages provided to communities over the course of an assessment are carefully prepared and well understood by the staff that will be bringing these messages to the field. They should avoid stigmatising or endangering children in any way, and avoid misunderstandings that could inadvertently increase incidences of separation, communities assuming, for instance, that their children will receive special services and financial assistance if they separate from them. Staff conducting assessments should also be prepared to take immediate preventive actions in the field, as required.

Analysis

An assessment should give a comprehensive picture of the situation of separation. Raw data provided by the assessment constitutes only a first step in the process, but it will have to be followed up by data processing and analysing. The analysis is often considered an integral part of the assessment, though it refers to the processing of data collected depending on the methodology used for the assessment.

The analysis of data is not an aseptic operation and requires further thinking with a view towards a protective intervention.

● How much are the separated children at risk?

● What measures are appropriate in the context to better protect the rights of the separated children?

● How can an intervention end the situation of separation, if possible, or minimise risks for separated children?

The potential impact of relief programmes on family unity, the basic subsistence and rights of separated children must be part of the analysis in order to determine actions to be implemented. The **do no harm** principle must be part of any analysis.

Training material for this topic

Exercise 1	Locating separated children
Exercise 2	Protection issues for separated children
Exercise 3	Risk and protective factors
Handout 1	Case studies
Handout 2	Part 1 Risk factors
Handout 3	Part 2 Protective factors

Topic 4
Planning and implementation

Programme implementation: prevention and response

Key learning points

- It is essential that activities aimed at limiting separations are established as quickly as possible during an emergency.

- The overall process of responding to separation has six distinct but overlapping stages:

  - identification

  - registration and documentation

  - tracing

  - verification

  - reunification

  - follow-up.

- A standardised system of information management that includes data collection and/or data sharing is essential for good documentation.

- Confidentiality must be maintained throughout all stages of the process.

- A multi-agency approach is essential in conducting effective tracing and reunification activities.

  There are a range of strategies that can be conceived to address concerns around the separation of children from their parents or caregivers (service delivery, capacity development and advocacy) for more information see **Foundation module 3** Programme design. The final objective is to prevent separation, and, if it is has occurred, to identify separated children, provide temporary care, and reunify children with their families or legal guardians as soon as possible. Strategies implemented have to be the result of a contextualised assessment and analysis of the situation. There is not a magic formula to achieve results, but actions must best satisfy the needs and best interests of the children in the field.

Strategies for preventing or reducing separation

Because family separation is likely to occur in emergencies and other humanitarian contexts, when there is advance information that an emergency may occur (anticipation of an upsurge in fighting, a large population movement, a natural disaster) steps should be taken to prevent or reduce child separation and loss of identities.

General measures that can be taken to prevent and/or mitigate the most negative impacts of separation include:

- Conducting assessments on the potential scale, causes and location of likely separations, for example, locations that may be targets or roads the fleeing population may take

● Developing emergency plans, including plans to prevent and respond to separation, in coordination with relevant government, UN non-governmental humanitarian agencies, and community leaders, including joint efforts to review and update existing emergency plans

● Ensuring that interventions by aid agencies do not cause separation either accidentally or deliberately

● Training government staff, NGO staff, and community leaders on ways of preventing and responding to separation

● Increasing community awareness about the causes and consequences of separation

● Supporting efforts to register children at birth or shortly thereafter

Several of these measures warrant further discussion as follows.

Developing emergency plans

Separated children are often the focus of a large and bewildering number of agencies and professionals, both national and international. Their involvement stretches from the identification stage, through the provision of protection services, right up to the reunification of families.

During the early stages of a crisis, either at the onset of an emergency, or anticipation thereof, agencies and government bodies must work together to obtain a good understanding of what others in the field are doing, where the gaps are, and what partnerships will be necessary to prevent and respond to separation and other child protection issues.

Following are some basic issues and actions that should be addressed when developing an emergency plan to ensure proper coordination among agencies working on separation at both the regional and national levels. It should be noted that the protection cluster strives to address these actions via a coordinated interagency response.

● **Mapping** For each country of concern, a picture or map of the agencies involved should be developed, since the level of engagement with separated children can differ significantly depending on the emergency. UN agencies like OCHA or national authorities can be charged with the mapping exercise.

● **Core principles** Partner organisations should agree on core principles at the outset, to which each is prepared to make a commitment. While often difficult, the process of discussion and exploration of common ground and areas of disagreement is an important way of revealing some of the more deeply held beliefs that shape the identity and underpin the practice of each agency. For those working to secure the rights of the child, the four general principles of the CRC must guide the activities:

  ● participation

  ● non-discrimination

  ● best interest

  ● survival and development.

● **Standardised systems** Comprehensive interagency data collection forms and a database already exist (see for example Inter-agency child protection database

material by UNICEF, Save the Children Federation and the International Rescue Committee[7]). Therefore partner organisations must agree early on about the systems that will be used for information management (data sharing and data collection), as well as how and where this data will be stored. Field-staff need information management training, for example, use of data collection forms, confidentiality and database training. These issues require close coordination and planning.[8] Any data collection involving key stakeholders must use participatory, child-friendly and enabling methodologies.

● **Review of existing emergency preparedness plans** Where these plans exist, they should be jointly referred to and understood, in order to ensure smooth coordination between agencies and a smooth response to an emergency. If they do not exist, efforts to put them in place, across agencies, should be initiated.

● **Regional collaboration** Links with existing regional bodies working on child protection should be made early on to help with coordination across large geographical areas.

● **Division of responsibilities** Organising a solid prevention and preparation plan requires that work be divided across agencies, to avoid overlap, waste, and confusion. Work should be divided according to agency commitment, location, capacity, and expertise.

● **Resources** Coordination should include efforts to leverage resources between agencies, including trained national staff, vehicles, and other resources required to conduct outreach, collect accurate data, and address identified needs.

● **Humanitarian interventions** It is essential to ensure that efforts by aid agencies, even though well coordinated, do not increase the separation of children and families. All measures must be implemented to prevent family separation or loss of identity prior to and after the onset of an emergency.

Ensuring that interventions by aid agencies do not cause separation

During conflict and other life-threatening emergencies, parents often take children away, or send them away if they think this will ensure their survival. Agencies that work in emergencies are often faced with difficult decisions about how much support they should give to these actions. Where children are unlikely to survive unless they are evacuated, the answer seems clear. But the situation is often difficult to assess, and in the rush to remove children from danger, basic precautions for safeguarding their identity may be ignored.

'In former Yugoslavia, families sent their children away for what they believed would be a period of only a few weeks. However, some of these separations eventually went on for so long that they became permanent; in addition, population movements caused people to lose track of each other.' [9]

Experience has shown, in fact, that evacuation is not always the best response. It can lead to further and sometimes permanent separations and all the related protection risks that this entails. In some recent conflicts, agencies have arranged poorly organised and ill-considered evacuations which have sometimes resulted in long-term separation from parents, as well as children living in unsatisfactory conditions, sometimes in a foreign country.

Evacuation should only be carried out as a last resort when life is threatened and, wherever possible, families should be evacuated together. Evacuating children without family members should be resorted to only after carefully determining that:

● protection and assistance cannot be provided in place

● evacuation of the entire nuclear family is not feasible.

UNHCR and UNICEF, supported by ICRC, produced a paper *Evacuation of children from conflict areas: considerations and guidelines* (1992), it provides an interesting analysis derived from a joint mission to the former Yugoslavia. The conclusions suggest three central principles:

1 Protect and assist Evacuation may reflect the failure of protection and assistance by local communities, governments and aid agencies. Protection and assistance should be provided in place.

2 Preserve family unity If children have to be moved it is important that they are accompanied by a family member.

3 Evacuate only under proper conditions The guidelines set out some key recommendations which ensure that the wishes of parents and children are considered, that evacuation is undertaken in safety, that proper arrangements are made for the reception of children, and that help is given to ensure that further or permanent separation does not occur.

'During the medical evacuation of persons injured by the earthquake in Pakistan, volunteers were mobilised to gather details of unaccompanied children at airstrips.'

Children can become lost or be permanently separated from their families if their personal details are not recorded during evacuation or if this information is not passed on to the appropriate people. When an evacuation is being considered, an agency experienced in tracing and work with separated children should be involved in the planning and the implementation. Other things that should be taken into consideration include the following.

● The child should be evacuated to a place as close as possible to the child's home or family.

● Adequate information about the evacuating agency and intended care arrangements for the child needs to be readily available.

● Children need to be fully registered and documented (special care should be taken where children are medically evacuated during an emergency).

● A copy of the registration should always accompany a child, and additional copies should be given to the family, national authorities, if appropriate, and to an international organisation (UNICEF, UNHCR and/or ICRC, depending on the contextual arrangement).

● Reunification needs to be carried out as soon as possible.

Training government staff, NGO staff, and community leaders on ways of preventing and responding to separation

Also essential in protecting the welfare of separated children are efforts to adequately prepare the humanitarian community that will be working with them. The actions of

international agencies can unintentionally increase separation, if not carried out carefully. Humanitarian staff must know how to work in a way that prevents separation and what to do if they find a separated child. This often requires training and guidance on the following issues:

- Delivering prevention messages to children and families

- Identifying, registering and referring separated children to the appropriate services and agencies

- Carrying out family tracing, verification and reunification

- Avoiding any humanitarian action, existing or planned, that would increase the risk of separation and/or hinder eventual reunification, including: the evacuation or movement of children without parents or relatives, unless the life of the child is in danger, and the adoption of separated children before all tracing efforts have been exhausted

- Carefully reviewing, developing, advocating for and implementing all the measures families and humanitarian workers can take to prevent family separation or loss of identity prior to and after the onset of an emergency

Increasing community awareness about the causes and consequences of separation

Increasing community awareness about the causes and consequences of separation is one of the most vital of preventive measures. The active involvement of local leaders, local authorities, medical facilities, transit centres, religious organisations, youth groups and other community bodies is especially important, as are information campaigns designed to promote widespread awareness of the issues. The use of mass-media, such as radio, is also important, particularly in non-camp situations and during large-scale population movements, including both flight and repatriation.

Some of the messages that should be transmitted to communities as a method of prevention include the following.

- Protect young children through the use of identification bracelets.

- Teach children two years old and older to say their first and last names, that of their parents, and, if possible, their address.

- Teach older children to take care of younger siblings and to hold onto them.

- Establish rendezvous points in different directions to run to in the event of flight, including homes of relatives, religious institutions, schools, and other community structures known to children.

- Teach children to immediately contact the local Red Cross or Red Crescent Society if they get separated or, if neither are present, any humanitarian worker.

- If a long walk is anticipated, attach a light rope to children's wrists to connect them to parents and siblings.

- Avoid leaving children in institutions, such as boarding schools, hospitals, or orphanages during an emergency, as this may lead to permanent separation. If children are already in such institutions at the time of an emergency, parents should be encouraged to take them back.

● Community members have a responsibility to prevent and respond to separation.

Supporting efforts to register children at birth or shortly thereafter

Although the CRC calls for all children to be registered **immediately after birth**, according to the latest UN estimate, around 48 million children annually are not registered at birth.[10] This leaves many children without proper birth registration at the time they are separated from their family which brings numerous problems and risks to the children. Family tracing becomes difficult when there is no documentation especially in the case of very young children or children with mental or communication disabilities.

Children have the right to their own identity and also to a nationality based on the Universal declaration of human rights and the CRC. Birth certificates are needed for a number of services and offer a degree of legal protection for children. Lack of one, therefore, can be extremely detrimental for a child, particularly a separated child and particularly during evacuations. Among other potential problems, there is a risk of the child losing her or his identity and being given a new name.

Along with advocacy about the potential dangers of poorly organised evacuations, is the need for more advocacy regarding birth registrations with communities (parents, local religious and spiritual leaders, children themselves) and authorities (local, national and regional[11]). All children should be legally registered as soon as possible after birth and, in the case of separated children, the child's identity, including nationality as well as the identity of his or her family, must be recorded and preserved. Organisations caring for separated children must seek to obtain the documentation needed to record a child's identity and affiliation, if known, in order to end separation and prevent further separations. If a child's identity is not known, the relevant authorities should take appropriate measures to ascertain it. In short, a new identity should be established only as a last resort.

Strategies for responding to separation

Responses to separation involve six distinct but overlapping stages:

1 identification

2 registration and documentation

3 tracing

4 verification

5 reunification

6 follow-up.

Identification

The **identification** process establishes which children are separated from their families or caregivers and where they are to be found. Information gathered at the identification point must be sufficient to lead those doing the documentation back to the child.

Family tracing and reunification cannot take place until separated children are identified. In populations of refugees or displaced persons where there are separated children, identifying and documenting them should be regarded as an urgent task. Young children quickly forget information about their past. It is important for children to be reunified as quickly as possible. It is also important that they do not experience multiple moves to different caregivers, if possible. When resources are limited, separated babies and young children should be prioritised over those who are older and better able to fend for themselves.

Separated children can be found anywhere. They may be alone, in groups with other children, in related and unrelated families, on the street, in prison, with armed groups, or in the homes of staff members. Common places and sources of useful information on the location of separated children include:

- other children
- national staff will know some families who have separated children, and may also be caring for some themselves
- heads of communities, including leaders in refugee and IDP camps
- women members of the community
- religious leaders, as families who go to churches, mosques, temples and other religious institutions tend to be among the first to take in separated children
- markets and other places where street children congregate at night
- road-side restaurants and tea shops which employ children
- orphanages, boarding schools, and other residential places for children
- prisons, reform schools, or authorities who are in charge of them
- school principals, teachers, medical personnel, and public health personnel.

In identifying separated children, it is essential that the CRC prescribed age of 18 is respected. It is, however, often difficult to verify ages. The best advice is to use local knowledge since each community has variables on how age is determined. In making any age determination, however, separated children must be given the benefit of the doubt. Someone claiming to be below 18 years of age, should generally be treated as such.

'It should never be assumed that a child is unaccompanied. Even though he or she may have been found alone, there could be family members nearby. If there are other members of the community in the vicinity they may be able to provide useful information or even take care of the child.'

Avoiding further separations

There may be only one opportunity to find information about a separated child, particularly if she or he is very young. Anyone who comes across a separated child must try to find out as much as possible about them as quickly as possible. Identification requires, however, a balance of sensitivity and alertness. Children need to be actively sought out and identified, but existing family-based care should not be disrupted.

When identifying separated children, care must also be exercised to avoid encouraging separations. A great deal of clarity is required up front to avoid any misunderstandings about what services will and will not be provided for separated children, their families and caregivers. If there is any belief, for instance, that special assistance will follow identification and registration interviews, families may be encouraged to claim their own children as unaccompanied. Similarly, those who are caring for separated children might reject them if they expect to receive assistance and then receive none. Additional problems that caseworkers need to be sensitive to, include the following.

● For reasons ranging from love for and attachment to the children, to exploitation of their labour, caregivers may fear that children will be taken away from them and declare them as their own.

● If there is any expectation that residential centres for separated children will be created, families may register their children as unaccompanied to grant them better access to food, clothing, and education.

● Traditional childcare arrangements may be weakened if families are made to believe that **others** are there to take responsibility for their separated children.

'As the experience with the so called **Lost boys** *in Kakuma, Kenya, proved, separated girls are not always identified adequately. In this particular case, they had to a large extent been absorbed by other families, as they provide an extra pair of hands and, in some traditions or cultures, the opportunity for receiving a bride price if the girl gets married. For such reasons, it is often important to make extra efforts to identify girls who have been separated, as they may not be treated the same as the biological children, and could become victims of abuse and exploitation.'*

A number of precautions can be taken prior to conducting systematic identification of separated children, to avoid some of the common difficulties caused by these misunderstandings. These include:

● Learning about and understanding the culture with regards to care arrangements of orphans and other separated children, including whose responsibility it is to take them in, the treatment of orphans, and the particular emergency setting and living conditions of the community

● Orienting staff to the potential damage to children and communities which the process of identification could cause

● Discussing with the staff the fact that separation can also occur at a later stage and that extra efforts need to be made to identify girls who are separated

● Discussing with staff the several methodologies already tested in other settings, determining whether they are appropriate, and identifying other culturally appropriate ways of identifying separated children without disrupting existing care. However, even when children are being cared for, they still must be identified, as future issues may emerge in their care arrangements as the context changes.

Registration and documentation

Registration is the compilation of key personal data, including full name, date and place of birth, father's and mother's names, former address and present location. This information is collected for the purpose of establishing the identity of a child, for protection and to facilitate tracing.

Documentation is the process of recording further information in order to meet the specific needs of a child, including tracing needs and to make plans for the child's future. This is a continuation of the registration process, not a separate undertaking.

Registration and documentation are the first steps towards protecting and preserving the identity of a child who has been separated from family members. It establishes the legal process for separated children's protection and allows the necessary information to be gathered in order to immediately search for the child's family. Parents and caregivers who are missing are also registered for the same reasons.

During the mass returns of refugees to Rwanda in late 1996, 10,000 unaccompanied children were identified. Over 75% of these were promptly reunited, due largely to a strategy of returning the children directly to their communities of origin rather than placing them in temporary centres. Key factors to success were interagency coordination and collaboration, well organised documentation, immediate registration, parent registration, photo-tracing, and cross-border cooperation.[12]

Examples like the Rwanda one above have repeated almost systematically during any emergency either during conflicts (for example, during the wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia in the late nineties and early 2000s) or after natural disasters (Pakistan earthquake in 2005 and likely after the Myanmar cyclone in 2008). Registration of separated children, as well as parents who have lost their children, should be carried out as soon as possible following identification. It is best carried out using a standardised format of data collection, such as the interagency registration form, which should then be entered into an interagency database. Depending on coordination arrangements and the respective roles of international organisations in a particular area or situation (for example, refugee, internal displacement), a copy of the registration form should also be forwarded to UNICEF, UNHCR, and/or ICRC. An additional copy should be provided to the child and their carer, and follow the child during any movements or relocations, along with birth certificates and any other documents of identification, medical reports, and school certificates.

What to document?

The following information should, at a minimum, be documented when registering a separated child and/or their parents.

- **The nature of the separation** Namely, whether the child is simply separated or unaccompanied.

- **The child's identity** A child's full name, including nickname, nationality, place of birth, age, gender, and information about the family. The compilation of a chart showing the child's family, other relatives and possibly friends may also be helpful.

Spelling variations on names, as well as traditional ways of identifying children should also be noted.

● **A unique registration number** The child may be assigned additional identification numbers by other agencies later on, so it is best to include the initials of the organisation registering the child in the registration number.

● **The child's current living situation** Address, type of placement, details of adults caring for the child, presence of siblings and protection concerns.

● **History of separation** Date, place and circumstances of separation, how and when the child came to be in the current placement.

● **The child's opinions and wishes** Perceptions of the current placement, hopes and ideas for the future and who they wish to trace.

Currently, the standardised interagency registration forms from the Interagency child protection database provide the most comprehensive method of collecting data on separated children as well as parents of separated children. Samples of these forms are included in the database forms material in **Handout 3**.

In addition to the above information, a photograph is normally taken as part of the documentation process. This should be taken as soon as possible, with the child in the same clothes they were wearing at the time of separation. The photograph must be given the same number as the form and attached immediately, but the name of the child should never appear on the photograph for confidentiality purposes.

How to document?

Documentation generally involves interviews with the separated child, as well as other people who have knowledge of the child. It can include discussions within the community, so that anyone who might know the child is able to provide information about them and understand the importance of tracing. It can also include drawing and play to elicit information from children, especially those who are young or who have difficulty expressing themselves verbally.

Documentation is a sensitive task that requires a good deal of training not only in interviewing children but the whole tracing process. It is generally an ongoing process, not a one-off interview and agencies should continue to document issues related to the child over time. Issues such as: progress in school, health concerns, protection challenges and solutions and changes in temporary care arrangements. This documentation would also assist in conducting best interests determination for the child, since all of the above factors must be taken into consideration. Those who undertake it should have a knowledge of the child's language and culture, skills and experience in working with children (especially in interviewing children) and a great deal of sensitivity and patience, particularly when the child is being asked to recall painful and frightening events. Good literacy skills, a firm understanding of forms and procedures being used and an ability to keep good records are also important.

Confidentiality is also essential, and this must be very well understood by all who are working to document cases of separation. Caution has to be taken when sharing and publishing information on separated children, including photographs of children for tracing. Agencies and field offices must ensure permanent preservation of records because children later in life often have to obtain information on their origins, but they must also ensure that this data is well protected. In certain contexts it may be decided

that records are best kept centralised under the responsibility of a specialised organisation.

Conducting interviews

Prior to conducting interviews with children, it is important to prepare both them and their caregivers. The objective of the registration should be explained, taking care to ensure that there are no expectations of additional assistance. It should also be explained that all information provided will remain confidential.

If the child is very young or appears frightened to be alone with strangers, efforts should be made to have someone who knows the child well present. Interpreters might also be necessary, in cases where the interviewer does not speak the child's language, but care should be used to select someone who is outside of the child's immediate environment and more likely to be objective.

Those conducting interviews should budget plenty of time to talk to children and organise a quiet place in which to carry out the interview. It is best to select a place with the child, to allow them to take an active part in the process. They should also use the opportunity to assess the overall protection and care situation for the child. Immediate referrals for nutritional or medical attention should be provided if the child appears to be malnourished or in poor health.

Children may not disclose all information about themselves and their family immediately or even the correct information. There are many reasons for this. They may fear how the information will be used, they may be trying to protect others or even themselves emotionally, or they may be confused and temporarily blocking out information they will recall later. **Handout 5** provides some practical steps to interviewing a child and encouraging them to talk.

Taking photographs

Ideally every separated child should be photographed immediately or as soon as possible. Two photographs should be taken, one frontal and one at ¾ view (midway between frontal and side-view), both from the shoulders up. It is always best to take photos with a flash and in front of a neutral background. Children should also be photographed in their original clothes, if at all possible.

It is recommended that several copies of the photos be made, one to attach to the child's file, one to give to the child or carer and others for later use, particularly for photo-tracing if needed. Priority should be given to photographing children under five years and, as with all aspects of tracing and reunification, care should be taken when considering the protection of photographed children.

Developing mobility maps and flow diagrams

Another resource for family tracing strategies is *Mobility mapping and flow diagrams, tools for family tracing and social reintegration work with separated children*[13]. Mobility mapping is a process by which adapted participatory learning and action (PLA) tools are applied to cases of separated children in order to elicit information and shift from traditional social science methodologies (such as interviews and questionnaires) toward a more participatory, action-oriented process. In some cases, this has dramatically increased the possibilities for eliciting crucial information where before such information often remained hidden, which has helped reduce caseload and reunite hundreds of children with their families.

Handling special cases

With some children it is simply difficult to obtain enough information to start tracing, this may be due to their young age, a disability or because they are traumatised and may not know their address, their parents' identity or even their own identity. This is particularly true for babies and toddlers.

Special procedures may be required to obtain information from special cases. These include the following.

● **Early documentation** A child's memory may fade quickly and clues to their identity (clothes and other possessions) may get lost.

● **Extended interviews** Some children may require interviews that are spaced out over a longer time period and involve more hands on activities, such as drawing or play.

● **Involving others** Obtain information from other people who may know something about a child's past, including the person who initially found the child. These people might also be helpful in interviewing the child, particularly if they know something about the child's original home that might help to jog their memory.

● **Using caregivers** People responsible for caring for children in the interim period might also be a good source for obtaining information, if a child's potential for reunification does not threaten them financially or otherwise. Most have already gained a child's confidence and can use opportunities, such as bath and feeding times to talk to them in a safe and comforting environment.

● **Taking photographs** A variety of photographs should be taken as early as possible, with the clothes the child was wearing when the separation occurred, if possible. Sibling groups should also be photographed together.

● **Mobility mapping** (see above).

Initially, babies and young children should not be moved from the location where they were found unless their safety is at risk. Clothes and any medals, bracelets or other objects they were wearing, together with a copy of their photograph, should be kept in a safe place for future use if an adult comes later to claim them. Tracing activities should be started immediately, preferably using the interagency forms and database records as much as possible (see **Handout 3**).

Other special cases, including Children associated with armed forces or armed groups (CAAFAG) and children with disabilities, might require more specific interventions, due to the greater protection issues these groups often face. For more information on tracing and reunification activities for these populations, please see **Critical issue module 7** Children associated with armed forces or armed groups and **Critical issue module 3** Children with disabilities. Also see the CAFF profile and Profile for children under five in **Handout 3** which provide guidelines on additional questions to ask in the documentation process.

Tracing

Tracing, in the case of children, is the process of searching for their family members or primary legal or customary caregivers. The term also refers to the search for children whose parents are looking for them. The objective of tracing is reunification with parents or other close relatives.

Organisations that take on tracing need to be well prepared to do so. A tracing programme requires a complex and rigorous organisation and a high level of coordination and expertise. Sufficient resources for transport and communication are needed, as is a good administration system with clear roles and responsibilities. Not all child protection agencies undertake tracing, only a few organisations, often only one, will be tasked with formal tracing in a given region. This is due to the complexity of the process and the great amount of resources needed to carry it out. Agencies that do not undertake formal tracing can however, support it by assisting with other parts of the process, such as identification and registration.

'Information about the possible whereabouts of family members can come from anywhere, at anytime. Unless claims are gathered in a central place which processes the information, a child risks being reunited with a distant relative, while a parent, for instance, is also claiming him or her somewhere else, unbeknownst to the child or agency doing the reunification.'

The Inter-agency child protection database
The Inter-agency child protection database, referenced previously, helps to coordinate tracing activities and make them more efficient. However, it is important for close coordination to also take place with ICRC, which uses a different database to conduct separate family tracing activities. Use of a database is important in all tracing programmes, especially in regions in which several neighbouring countries are facing conflict.

Key tracing principles

Staff involved in tracing should also be trained in interview procedures and the ethics involved in tracing, as well as the following key principles.

● **Early tracing** Following separation, tracing must be started as early as possible to maximise chances of success. When large groups of children are separated from their parents, priority should be given to unaccompanied and very young children. Even if immediate family reunification is not possible, tracing is important in restoring links with their families.

● **Strong coordination** Tracing requires very strong coordination and collaboration with all relevant actors.

● **Children have a right to be consulted and informed of progress on their case** Children must be kept informed and consulted on tracing, as they are a valuable source of information and have a right to know the status of their case.

● **Children and parents have a right and emotional need to know the other is alive** Unless potentially unsafe, contact between child and family should be established as soon as possible, even if reunification, because of safety or other reasons, is not yet possible.

- **The support of local resources is critical** Members of the child's community are the best informants. They should be consulted about the possible whereabouts of the child's family.

- **Safety of child and family comes first** Sharing information across key organisations involved in tracing must be considered carefully to ensure confidentiality and the safety of individuals. Never disclose on a photograph or a list or to strangers, the current location of a child.

- **Patience is essential** Tracing is a long-term commitment. Displacement, sometimes across borders, separations of babies and other reasons may delay locating family members by several years.

- **Reunification is only the beginning** A child's re-entry into their family must be facilitated. Adjustment to reunification requires adequate preparation and follow-up. For children who have been separated from their families for long periods of time or who may have experienced or participated in conflict activities during the time of separation, reintegration strategies may need to be developed

- **Local authorities must be informed** Efforts should be made to inform and involve local authorities in the tracing process, unless such a move poses a potential danger to the child and their family.

Approaches to tracing

There are several approaches to tracing.

- **Spontaneous tracing** consists of activities carried out by families and communities outside of organised tracing programmes. It is important to understand how people in the community go about tracing and especially the networks used for gaining information.

- **Case-by-case tracing** involves workers following up information on relatives in the area in which they are believed to reside. This approach tends to be time consuming and labour and transport intensive, though it is sometimes possible for several families to be traced in a particular locality during one visit.

- **Centre-based tracing** is usually undertaken by centre staff on behalf of children living there, especially when they originate from the surrounding area. Sometimes this work can be done on an inter-centre basis, with centre staff cooperating with each other.

- **Large-scale tracing** or tracing over large geographical areas, requires rather different approaches. Either one agency with staff in relevant locations takes responsibility or different agencies work cooperatively. This clearly requires solid agreements on procedures, standardised documentation and good systems for processing information (see **Handout 3** and **Handout 4**). It also relies heavily on good community work, liaising with community leaders and convening meetings.

- **Mass tracing** is a term used to describe a variety of approaches used in situations where there are large numbers of separated children making case-by-case tracing expensive and time consuming. It is particularly appropriate in situations in which there are a large number of separated children thought to come from a particular area or where there are large numbers of families, for example in refugee camps. Mass tracing utilises various approaches, including displays of photographs or lists in public

places, public announcements, community meetings and list distribution among community leaders. Mass tracing also provides an opportunity for people who know a particular child or family to provide information and for families seeking lost children to come forward.

● **Cross border tracing** International accords, including the Geneva conventions, form the basis of local agreements on cross border tracing, including free access and travel, for facilitating the cross border tracing work of agencies, such as the UNHCR and ICRC.

'Many families in the DRC experienced multiple displacements over a large area. Save the Children set up a series of mobile listening points (tracing points) in key areas where populations were likely to gather eg. camps and markets. Parents looking for their children were able to search a database of missing children or register a missing child. This database was updated regularly and parent and children were encouraged to check often.'

More on cross border tracing

Tracing across international borders takes time and it can be difficult to keep track of separated children during this period. A tracing system must be in operation on both sides of the border and there must also be channels for exchanging information, including a centralised database (see **Handout 3** [14]). Where more than one agency is involved, they must all cooperate in passing information to the agency centralising the data. If this does not happen, time is wasted duplicating tracing for children whose cases should have been closed. It is important to have a strong tracing network in place and to work closely with local communities and governments who may be able to support tracing activities, unless sharing information with governments puts the child or their family in danger.

Normally, the reunification of separated refugee children is only considered with parents (as opposed to any other family members) in the country of origin. If children are reunited with members of the extended family in the country of origin and their parents remain in the country of asylum, there is a possibility of permanent separation occurring. Similarly, voluntary repatriation of a separated child before the family is found may require continued tracing in the former country of asylum or elsewhere.

Obstacles to tracing

Given the uncertain political climate that leads to separation, it is only natural that a number of obstacles often arise when trying to trace children. The most prominent are as follows.

● **Insecurity** It may be difficult to trace families or reunite children in conflict settings. However, the family and the child have the right to decide if they want to be together and in most circumstances, their wish must be respected even if it means that the child will be returned to insecure settings.[15]

● **Poor interagency coordination and collaboration** In some settings there is little understanding of the critical role coordination plays in tracing efforts. Information is not shared in a timely or complete manner, delaying the process. This also has a demoralising effect on the tracing staff who feel powerless to change the situation.

● **Restricted access** Some areas may be restricted by the authorities because of political or military sensitivity. In these cases, access for tracing workers may need to

be negotiated. Sometimes it is not only restricted access, but also the fact that cross border tracing through Red Cross messages (RCMs) could place the receivers and/or their family in danger as the RCMs could be read by government officials or authorities who may punish them for having family members who fled the country. Governments may see people who fled the country as traitors or supporters of non-State actors. Sometimes even in-country tracing could put the receivers at risk as they may be illegally residing in the country as they do not want to be confined to living in a refugee camp.

●

● **Resistance from caregivers in transit care** It is not uncommon that caregivers in children's centres hold on to children or impede tracing. Some have been known to change a child's name or tell frightening stories to the children about their place of origin so as to keep the children in their care and justify their job.

Verification

Verification is the process of establishing the validity of relationships and confirming the willingness of the child and the family member to be reunited.

Whenever adults claim children, or family members are traced, their identities and claims must be verified before the adults and children are brought together. Claims are sometimes mistaken or false, and different families may claim the same child. In all cases, protection of the child's best interests must be the overriding concern.

The purpose of verification is to prevent a child from being reunified with the wrong person. This can happen by accident, perhaps because of mistaken identity or bureaucratic errors, or more malevolent reasons such as a desire for revenge or to exploit the child's labour.

● Verification is a built-in protection mechanism in the tracing system that prevents unauthorised people from accessing children who are separated from their families. It must **always** be carried out. Verification checks that the person claiming the child really is who they say they are.

● Verification is also used to establish that relatives are willing and able to take a child and that the child wishes to be reunited with these relatives.

When there is good information on the child's documentation form, verification should be straightforward. A more complex procedure is required where there is limited or no information about the child. In emergencies when there are large numbers of separated children, procedures for verification can be simplified, but they should still be done.

When, where and how to verify

Verification of an adult's identity and willingness to take a child should be carried out at the time someone comes forward to claim a child or someone is found through tracing. Informally, however, it should be carried out throughout all stages of the tracing process.

Verification can be carried out in a tracing office, at a mass tracing meeting, or at the person's home if they are found on a tracing visit. It is carried out by tracing workers

who ask the adult and child questions and record the information on a verification form. Verification forms must always be completed (see **Handout 3**). The following outlines the steps required in verifying the relationship between a child and an adult claimant.

1 **The identity of the adult is checked** This can be done by examining local identification papers. Where these are not available, local authorities should be used to verify the claimant's identity.

2 **The adult confirms whether they are willing and able to care for the child** This usually involves visits from tracing or other programme staff who make a rapid assessment of the family and the place of reunification: identifying family resources, shortcomings and services available in the community, particularly schools. During this visit, parents or relatives are also informed about the state of the child and their willingness and ability to look after the child (until adulthood) is ascertained. Any accounts of previous abuse or neglect of the child are also investigated during this period, particularly if any involve relatives or community members. Claimants are usually asked to sign a custody form.

3 **Information provided by the person claiming the child, about the child and their family, is checked with the original documentation form** Information given by the claimant is checked against information on the child's registration form.

4 **Information provided by the person claiming the child is checked with the child** Obviously very young children will not be able to verify information and there may be instances when the child is too distressed or separation has been too long for them to remember family members. In the case of babies, verification is sometimes extremely difficult, but often former neighbours of the family or other people who were with the family when they lost their child can be brought in to help verify information. When more than one person claims to be the child's relative, DNA testing, now easy to do and relatively cheap, must be done.

5 **The child confirms whether they wish to live with the person found** The child should give their consent to live with a claimant. While there is no legal precedent for a child to refuse reunification when the claimant is a verified biological parent, if the child expresses reluctance, consent needs to be discussed or balanced with parental rights and best interest. Separated children should be encouraged to talk about their apprehensions and hopes. They should be informed about the circumstances and wishes of their parents or relatives and their feelings about them should be established to determine: whether the child is willing to live with them; only to establish contact; or neither.

'After the Tsunami hit Aceh in December 2004, many children were separated from their families, and many other boys and girls were also killed. Afterwards agencies were confronted by a very difficult situation when children were claimed by several families at the same time and verification was extremely complicated in the post tsunami devastation.'
Humanitarian IRC worker testimony after the tsunami experience

During verification particular concerns may be expressed by the child, the family or observed by the tracing worker. The tracing worker needs to know how to respond to these. It is important to allow time to discuss these concerns. Most concerns will not be obstacles to reunification, they may simply be a case of the child or family needing

reassurance. Occasionally, the issues raised may be more serious requiring further action. This may involve more intensive preparation of the child and/or family and the community in which they live. Sometimes it will be necessary to make arrangements for future support through the community. Decisions need to be taken carefully, on a case by case basis, by skilled childcare professionals.

In some cases, a careful situation analysis will need to be carried out in order to arrive at decisions on the best interests of the individual child in complex and difficult cases. BID should be conducted in line with national laws and procedures (particularly in cases of natural disaster).

Storing information

Organisations collecting information must also ensure the permanent preservation of their records because:

● this information may be useful for tracing even many years later

● children may wish to obtain information on their origins later in life.

In most situations an interagency, UN or governmental decision is made as to where records will be centralised and preserved. It is important that this information be secured in locked filing cabinets and that electronic data be password protected. Information shared should also be secured via encrypted files or password protected files (see data protection protocols **Handout 6**).

Care should also be taken when considering the protection of photographed children. In some locations or situations this information can be sensitive and may prohibit the use of photographs for tracing and reunification. When photographs are used, the name of the child should never be on the photographs, only the identification number.

Implementation strategies: reunification, reintegration and follow-up

Key learning points

● Both separated children and their parents should be included in the preparation processes for their need to be adequately prepared for reunification.

● Adequate follow-up procedures require the participation and support of the community.

● There are a variety of care options for separated children, wherever possible, care arrangements should be provided in a family or community-based setting. Institutional options should be used only as a last resort.

● Children have the right to have their placement periodically reviewed and follow-up monitoring should be conducted regularly to ensure quality care and include input from children themselves.

Reunification and reintegration

Reunification is the ultimate aim of family tracing, to reunite the child with parents or family members. It is the process of bringing together the child and family or previous care provider for the purpose of establishing or re-establishing long-term care.

Reintegration is used to describe the re-entry of formerly internally displaced people into the social, economic, cultural and political fabric of their original community. According to UNHCR in order to be successful, reintegration, as it refers to returning refugees, requires access to reasonable resources, opportunities and basic services to establish a self-sustained livelihood in conditions of equal rights with other residents and citizens.[16]

Families become separated under difficult circumstances. The memories of separation and experiences since separation may make family reunification difficult. It must be recognised by agencies carrying out reunifications that this may not be an easy time for the child and family.

Preparation

It is important that the child, the family and the community receive some kind of preparation for reunification. Time should be set aside to discuss future plans, and explain what will happen and when. The opportunity should be given to ask questions and raise any concerns, and the child and family should be told what resources or support will be available following reunification if there are difficulties. If possible, photographs or letters should be exchanged before reunification.

All families and children require preparation before reunification, though to varying degrees. Once identities and relationships have been confirmed, and site visits made, the child and the relatives should be counselled separately and prepared for meeting and eventual reunification. In doing so, it is important to understand the following.

● When a separation has been long, a child may be hesitant to go and join relatives. In these situations, arrangements should be made for the claimant(s) to visit the child first, particularly in the case of more distant relatives. Transportation is sometimes required to facilitate this.

● Stories from the past, as well as photographs, audio tapes and videos of former familiar places and people, have proven extremely useful in helping a child rekindle feelings for their past and home. These tactics or approaches should be used during the preparation phase, as well as by families trying to reconnect with their child during the early stages of reunification.

● Social workers who have followed the cases of children in foster care should make certain that foster families are also kept abreast of plans and supported through their own emotional responses to the reunification. Farewell parties for children leaving foster care and centre-based care, to return to their families are often a good method of allowing for proper closure.

● In some cases, it may not be safe or possible to reunite a child with their family immediately. In these situations the child should be informed of the situation and the reasons, and contacts between the child and family maintained. ICRC's family

message service is usually available in these circumstances and may be used for this purpose.

It should also be noted that many changes occur to children and families during separation, particularly in cases when tracing has taken a long time. Children who have been used by fighting forces, lived on the streets, been injured, abused, exploited or infected with HIV and AIDS, may exhibit behaviour that is not recognisable or acceptable to families they are returning to. Similar changes to families, as well as the devastation of home communities during conflict, may also affect a child's ability to reintegrate. All of these issues need to be discussed and addressed with families and communities so that they understand the concerns, fears and needs of separated children before they return. Adequate time and resources are needed to allow for this.

In some cases, family reunification may not constitute the best interests of the child. In fact, the success of reintegration is largely dependent on the cause of separation. If, for example, a child left home voluntarily or because their family was unable to provide appropriate care, family reunification may not be the best solution. In these cases, it is necessary to look at what assistance other sectors may be able to provide in the area of livelihoods and basic service provision.

'We would like to be given a choice about where we live because we know best where we will be well treated, but we are not asked.'
Orphaned girl in focus group discussion with girls between the ages of 13 and 16, Malawi [17]

During the reunification process

When a child is reunited with their family the local authority and/or community leaders should be involved wherever possible and be given notification of planned reunifications. In reality, where many reunifications are taking place or when travel and communication are difficult, it may not be possible to inform people in advance. Local authorities should, however, be informed of reunifications which have taken place.

Whether reunification takes place in the family home or in public, it should include the following key elements:

- some kind of ceremony or acknowledgement of acceptance
- advice to the child and family on problems they may encounter
- a signed reunification form (essential, see **Handout 3**).

Acceptance ceremonies do not have to be elaborate. They can simply involve the reading and signing of the reunification form. They serve as a celebration and as a demonstration of the family's responsibility for the child, helping to ensure that the child is protected in their new environment. In a community setting, both the community and family publicly accept responsibility for the child.

A member of the tracing team should be with the child for reunification. Ideally, this should be someone who has worked with the child. It could also be the person who was responsible for tracing and verification and who, therefore, has met the family and the community leaders before. If the child has been in a children's centre or with a foster family, a caregiver can also accompany the child, as this is usually helpful for

both child and caregiver. Names and addresses of both families can be exchanged if appropriate. Caution is necessary in cases where foster families expect some form of payment or compensation from the child's family or in cases where caregivers are resistant to letting a child go.

Reunification also provides an opportunity for the tracing worker to discuss some of the difficulties the child and family may experience following reunification. When reunification is a public event, the tracing worker generally speaks publicly about the difficulties which might arise following reunification.

'A boy, 16 years old, from North Africa had a brother who was a member of a militant Islamic group. The police arrested and beat him in order for him to divulge his brother's whereabouts. They told him if he did not tell them they would continue to detain him. His parents sent him out of the country. He does not want his family to be contacted by an official organisation because he is afraid this would endanger his parents and younger siblings.'
Separated children in Europe programme

Support for receiving communities

Poverty is never a reason to deny reunification, but in cases of extreme poverty, plans must be made to help families, through referral to another agency or assistance. If assistance is provided it is better that it does not include money, that the package is basic and standardised and that it is carried out through existing community or local support systems. It is also better if families receiving separated children are not given special treatment compared to other families in equally difficult circumstances, and that all those carrying out reunification have a similar policy and approach to material assistance.

Inappropriate decisions about material assistance can cause resentment in the community and can also have negative effects on the welfare of individual children. Not providing it, however, can also prevent reunification, especially if there are difficult financial circumstances in the family. In these cases, the family or community can be assisted through existing systems of welfare support, including local authorities, churches and local and international organisations. Assistance to the community can include support for basic services, such as healthcare and education, income generation projects, or agricultural rehabilitation, such as a seed and tool programmes or livestock provision.

Follow-up

Follow-up refers to a range of activities for children and their families to facilitate their reintegration as described above. These activities may include social and economic support.

Follow-up visits are required once families are reunited to ensure that children are integrating appropriately and being treated well. These visits are especially important when children are joining distant relatives, have significant emotional or socioeconomic problems or are reluctant to join the family. If consistent follow-up visits are not possible in certain cases, these children and families should be referred to a local welfare agency or concerned community groups, such as women's associations, teachers and religious leaders.

In the context of reunification, the term **follow-up** generally describes what needs to be done to assist children and their families in moving forward, including:

● general support to a family, for instance, through visits by a social worker who helps the family link up with community support and resources

● support for the reintegration of children, particularly where there are family or emotional difficulties

● material support, such as assistance with school fees or other items.

It is important to ensure that everyone is clear on what is meant by follow-up in a particular case by discussing what it will involve, how it will be provided, by whom and for whom.

How to follow-up

How follow-up is carried out depends on the resources available and the needs of the individual child and family. One or two visits may be all that is necessary, for example, one visit one month after reunification and another up to six months later. In other cases, more frequent follow-up may be desirable. It is often possible to identify children who may need follow-up during the tracing process, based upon their past relationships with those they are being reunified with and the conditions of the homes they will be going to. Others do not become apparent until after reunification.

Once a child has been reunited they become the responsibility of the family and community and, ideally, follow-up should be conducted with the support of the community. It is best if potential sources of community support, such as community initiatives, local cooperatives and NGOs, are identified prior to reunification. Some involvement of a tracing worker may also be necessary to ensure that those involved in follow-up have suitable training and/or experience in dealing with children, families, and their problems (see **Handout 3**).

Alternatives to direct follow-up [18]

It is important to note that while the follow-up of reunified children is desirable, it cannot always be ensured. This is because children may join family members just about anywhere in a particular country, and few if any programmes, with the exception of those for the reintegration of children associated with armed forces or armed groups (CAAFAG), who are specifically funded to ensure follow-up reintegration interventions, have the necessary resources to reach children in hundreds of dispersed places on a regular basis. However, some measures can often be taken to ensure at least some monitoring during the early phase of post reunification in more difficult to reach locations.

If possible, attempts should be made to identify a local social service agency to conduct a few initial visits to ensure that children are adjusting well, and to give some support or referral if not. Simple indicators, such as ongoing school attendance or participation in social activities with peers, should also be developed to assist local communities in monitoring the reunification over the longer term.

Among the children reunified, and in consultation with community members, criteria should also be established for priority follow-up on a longer-term basis, namely, children who are thought to have the most difficulty adjusting to living with their

family again. Depending on the particular situation, priority cases might include children who are:

- traumatised or have significant emotional problems

- joining family members that they do not know well

- joining family members who are elderly, impoverished, and/or otherwise disadvantaged

- resistant to returning home

- extremely young (infants or toddlers).

An interagency exercise is currently being developed to distinguish criteria that will help prioritise cases for follow-up. These criteria will not be set in stone, but rather adaptable across locations, due to the various situations in different countries and environments. With the constraints on time and resources faced by most reunification programmes, this exercise promises to provide a valuable tool for follow-up.

In all instances of follow-up, attempts should be made to get key community members interested in creating a welcoming environment for the child and in providing future support and referrals if needed. Efforts should also be made to ensure that all children have the name of either community people or agencies who have agreed to be contacted and to whom they can turn should the situation become intolerable.

When to end active tracing

Most separated children are not full orphans. Even when both parents are dead, many separated children have family members able and willing to care for them. Tracing should continue ideally until completion of the caseload, because experience shows that relatives may be found many years after separation. More specifically, experience has demonstrated the following.

- Even when immediate reunification is not possible, family tracing must be carried out for every child to at least restore contact with family members.

- Over the last 20 years, most of the separated children for whom family tracing started, were reunited within months of the separation.

- There are numerous examples of children whose family was successfully traced five, six or more years after separation, and reunification was possible and positive even after this long period of separation.

'I would like to rejoin my family because I feel great sadness when I remember my mother. Sometimes it is bad because it may happen that my parents may come and look for me and that they cannot find me because I am in a foster family.' [19]

It is not, however, financially feasible to continue tracing children's families over an extended period of time. It is also important that children begin living in a secure situation as soon as possible and follow reasonable criteria to determine when tracing efforts are going to end. The question, therefore, is when can tracing stop?

It is generally accepted that tracing can stop when:

- All reasonable efforts are made following natural disasters or parents have been identified among the dead. This will generally be a substantially shorter time than in conflict situations.

● The child is no longer a child (18 years old), as they have aged out of the family tracing cut-off age. These cases should be handed over to ICRC who will use Red Cross messages to continue the tracing efforts.

● All **reasonable efforts** to find family have failed. Reasonable efforts differ depending on the age of a child and their particular circumstances. In the case of babies, for instance, a period of two years of tracing is reasonable. This period must be extended for other children for whom enough tracing information exist when:

  ● communication with their area of origin is very poor and access has not been possible

  ● the population continues to be displaced over vast areas to which tracing teams have not had access.

Unless a child is 18 years old the decision to stop tracing is still left up to some discretion. Agencies will have to decide based on reasonable efforts, bearing in mind that continued tracing has led to eventual family reunification several years later. It should also be recognised that even a child's initial recollections about the status of their parents may be incorrect. Consider the following.

'10- or 11-year-old girl while being registered as an unaccompanied child tells of the attack on her village, of the many deaths, including both her parents. Less than a month later tracing for relatives finds both parents safe and sound in another refugee camp.'
Ngara, Tanzania, June 1994

There have, in fact, been many cases of non-orphaned children who report that their parents are dead, truly believe that they are dead, and in some instances, say that they have witnessed the death. The children were not lying, but rather confused by the large multitude of killings they witnessed. Some also found it easier to get on with their lives after psychologically burying and mourning their parents, as opposed to living under a shadow of uncertainty and unfulfilled hope.

The decision to stop tracing is therefore, a daunting task and one that should not even be considered until a child has at least secured a suitable, albeit temporary, living situation.

Interim care and psychosocial support [20]

Children who cannot be immediately reunited with parents or members of their extended family, as well as those whose current care placements are not satisfactory, need alternative care, whether temporary or long term. The timing, quality and consistency of the day-to-day care separated children receive are the most important factors in their wellbeing, recovery and overall protection.

Policies providing for the care of separated children, be it temporary or long term, are an **urgent priority** and must be firmly based on a child's best interests. This topic gives examples of the type of care that is available for separated and unaccompanied children and guidance on how to set up the most appropriate arrangements.

The UN is currently developing a set of guidelines on alternative care to help agencies and staff navigate the process of short- and long-term options for care of children who cannot be quickly reunited with their families.

Care options for separated children

The care status of a child should be assessed early on in an emergency, preferably during the identification and registration phase to ensure that the child's immediate living situation is adequate. Generally, most separated children will be found in one of the following arrangements.

● Children are taken in by members of their extended family.

● Children are cared for by older siblings, sometimes forming child-headed households.

● Children are fostered, either spontaneously through unrelated caregivers (whether within the displaced community or sometimes in the host community) or formally, through agencies operating foster programmes.

● Children are placed in various types of residential homes or centres where it is not possible to arrange family-based care.

● Children are living alone or on the streets with little to no adult supervision or support.

The fact is that relatively few children in emergencies are totally on their own because most are taken into the households of emergency-affected or other neighbouring families. The first thing to do is to assess the quality of these spontaneous **fostering** arrangements, and if found adequate, encourage and support families who have taken in the children so that they continue caring for them until the child's family is found. If they are not found to be adequate, then efforts should turn towards setting up formal or arranged fostering programmes. Every effort should be made to keep sibling groups together to avoid the further stress of sibling separation.

Care option: foster care [21]

In many societies there is a strong tradition of community responsibilities for children, though this does not necessarily mean that fostered children will be accorded the same level of care as children born to the family they are with. In Islamic societies, *Kafalah* is a form of care which allows an unrelated child to receive care but without a change in kinship status. In other societies, there may be no clear dividing line between fostering and adoption, as the latter is often not formalised by judicial procedures. In still other societies, it is not considered acceptable for children to live with unrelated caregivers. This may not necessarily preclude the initiation of a fostering programme, but cultural norms must be carefully taken into consideration.

In most emergency situations, it is unlikely that it will be possible to make use of and develop an existing fostering programme. Rather, it will be necessary to initiate a **situation specific** fostering programme. Fostering programmes need to be staffed by skilled personnel who are trained in working with children, assessing and supporting foster parents, carrying out community work and knowledgeable about family tracing principles and procedures. Fostering programmes also need to be planned in accordance with the legislation and policies of the country where they will be administered, including countries of origin, in the event of ultimate repatriation.

Setting up foster programmes

Programmes of formal fostering require considerable support. Agencies planning to set up or involve themselves in formal fostering must consider a number of long-term implications, including administrative and programme costs, infrastructure and

resources, management and the potential handover of the programme to government and/or local agencies.

Community support for fostering is essential and in many places, a good deal of advocacy is required to convince communities of the merits of having children cared for in families instead of orphanages. Criteria for choosing a foster family must also be established in collaboration with community members, so as to ensure respect for social and cultural factors. Criteria should take into consideration a foster family's ability to provide for the whole range of a child's needs, not just physical care, as well as their motivation for taking a child in. Determining the motivation of foster families, whether spontaneous or agency-arranged can be extremely difficult. Community leaders will likely play an important role in considering a family's suitability for fostering, including their motivations, and should be called upon to assist in this area.

Placing children in foster care

In placing children, it is important that a number of basic principles be followed, including but not limited to the Guiding principles. Firstly, children should be consulted about a possible placement. They should be introduced to the prospective foster family and given opportunities for expressing their wishes and feelings about the proposed placement. This may take some time and repeated visits to the foster home, but it is a child's basic right to participate in plans for their future. It is also important that siblings be kept together, unless this arrangement is contrary to the best interests of the children.

If possible, foster parents should come from the same ethnic and cultural background as the children and speak the same language. This is especially significant for refugee children, who should be fostered in families from their own country, including families that are also refugees. Allowing families from the host or asylum country to foster refugee children has proven detrimental to the children in the medium and long term. Monitoring is often impossible as families can move around the country at will and many do not understand or agree to abide by international law and practices regarding the care of refugee children. Host-country families are also more likely than refugee families to refuse to give the child to the biological family when found and when mass repatriation takes place, the separated children run the risk of remaining estranged outside their country.

Every placement of a child must be recorded with a signed agreement between foster parents and the fostering agency (or government as appropriate). The agreement should outline duties and responsibilities of the foster family and the agency. Foster parents must also agree to support and not interfere with tracing activities for the child and their eventual reunification with parents or other family members, where this is possible and in accord with the child's best interests.

The question of material support for fostering is a difficult and contentious one. In general it has been found preferable to institute a policy of no material support (apart from helping families to benefit from existing community-based projects), as this immediately precludes families motivated by material gain. On the other hand, the expense of caring for young children can sometimes be a major issue and the absence of some form of material support inevitably reduces the number of families volunteering to foster. Material support should be provided only if absolutely necessary and as much as possible as part of support provided to all vulnerable families, as it is potentially damaging to link material support solely to having taken in a separated

child. Similarly, any child specific support should be provided to a foster parents biological children as well as foster children where possible.

Care option: residential care[22]

The presence of children's residential centres can often serve to further encourage the separation of children from their families. Families may be encouraged to abandon their children at residential centres, if they think there will be significant benefits in doing so (for instance, education or food). Comfortable living conditions in a centre may also make children unwilling to leave or make it difficult for them to return to families with fewer resources.

> In the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami, up to half a million children live in residential care in Indonesia, one of the highest numbers of children in residential care in the world. Recent research has shown that the majority of child victims of the tsunami placed in institutional care still had both parents (43%) with 85% having at least one or both parents alive.[23]

Residential centres rarely offer an environment that is protective and nurturing enough for a developing child. Children often fail to gain the life skills at centres that they usually learn from their family or community, and abuse and neglect, which can happen in any care setting, generally goes undetected. Children's centres may also fail to keep accurate up-to-date records of children and their families and some have been known to discourage family tracing or attempts to find placements for children in foster families. Many do not follow ethical admission procedures, nor do they invest in periodic review of placements. Centres are also the most expensive intervention and the most disempowering, as they send clear messages to the community that **others** will take responsibility for the care of their children.

> About two months after a large refugee influx into an East African country in the '90s, a children's centre was still admitting several unaccompanied children a day. The centre's director asked the admission staff to immediately talk to every child presenting him or herself to the gate, and ask a simple question: *'can you take me to the person you were staying with last night?'* Disconcerted children lead the staff to the adults they had been staying with. Some were foster families, others were parents and a large number were other relatives. Some children had also been living in child-headed households and required special attention and protection.

In most emergencies, a significant number of children in children's centres or orphanages have been placed there by their families or recruited by the institution. It is important to try to find out as soon as possible which children have families nearby through frequent visits to the orphanage and talks with the children and staff. Resistance may be encountered from staff who have a vested interest in keeping as many children as possible, and with them their jobs, but this may be overcome through advocacy and awareness raising on child protection, as well as possibilities of alternative income generating opportunities. Children who feel rejected by relatives who placed them in the institution may also need some discussion time to re-establish trust in relatives and understand why they initially made the choice.

In some cases, there are no viable alternatives to orphanages. In these situations, attempts should be made to organise care in orphanages which is as close to family life as possible, including support for smaller, temporary centres that organise children into family-like groups of six to eight children under one responsible adult, while ensuring that siblings remain together. These centres should be committed to family reunification and children within them should be included in family tracing efforts. The centres should also be extremely sensitive to the needs of infants and young children, and capable of providing them with the close physical contact, attention and stimulation they need.

Care option: adoption

Adoption within western societies is generally understood as a form of childcare whereby the child's parental rights and responsibilities are permanently transferred to the adoptive parents, who are usually unrelated to the child by birth. The child normally takes the family name of the adoptive parents.

In refugee emergencies, if the question of the adoption of separated children is raised, it is vital that the notion of adoption is fully understood within the particular cultural context. It is UNHCR's policy[24] that children in emergency situations are not available for adoption for the following reasons.

● In emergency situations it is extremely difficult to ascertain whether a separated child has parents or other family members able to provide care. It is vital that exhaustive attempts at family tracing are made. Where parental consent is said to have been given, it is also extremely difficult to establish whether or not this has been freely given and whether the notion of adoption is fully understood.

● It is a requirement of the CRC that '*adoption is only carried out by competent authorities who determine, in accordance with applicable law and procedures and on the basis of all pertinent and reliable information, that the adoption is permissible in view of the child's status*' (CRC Article 21a). This is vital in ensuring that decisions are made in accordance with the best interests of the individual child and it is vital that any moves to place a refugee child are scrutinised very carefully. In an emergency, these procedures may not be in place.

● Any placement which uproots the child from their own community and culture should almost always be avoided as long as there is reasonable hope for successful tracing, which in practice means until a minimum of two years since tracing efforts actually started. Some exceptions may be made in the case of babies whose families are absolutely untraceable, these cases are rare, or unless parents have given their free and informed consent to the adoption. Be very careful about how **free** and **informed** this consent really is under the circumstances, as destitute families may give up their children feeling they cannot adequately care for them.

UNICEF, UNHCR, ICRC and Save the Children all share the view that children who have been separated from their parents during war or natural disasters should not be considered for inter-country adoption. In these situations, family tracing should be the priority, as there may be other living relatives even if both parents have died during the emergency.[25]

If adoption is accepted, it is imperative that documentation of the child's identity remains with them, no matter where and by whom they are being adopted. A familiarity with and sensitivity towards national adoption laws is also required, as the

State is ultimately responsible for adoption. Regular follow-up by social workers is also essential.

Adoption which requires a child to move to another country is known as inter-country adoption. Inter-country adoption is regulated by the Hague Convention on protection of children and cooperation in respect of inter-country adoption of 1993. In refugee situations where the issue of inter-country adoption is raised, it is imperative that it too is approached with the utmost caution and that the advice of competent experts is sought.

Care option: independent living (child-headed households)

The definition of what constitutes a child-headed household should be clearly understood when assessing the needs of children living independently in groups. Many of these groups are in fact supported by wider, extended family living nearby or even in the same compound. The children may be living in separate buildings for purely practical reasons, because there are too many people in the main house for instance, or for reasons to do with inheritance. Identifying such groups as child-headed households and targeting them for assistance risks encouraging more children to split from their family, or extended family.

Life for those children in genuinely child-headed households can be very difficult. Older children are faced with responsibilities beyond their years and younger children may be abandoned or exploited. If the oldest child marries, younger children may be left to fend for themselves. Where separated children wish to remain together, they should generally be supported. However, there may be circumstances, for example involving very young children, when alternative arrangements should be made. In refugee communities, the members of child-headed households should be helped to gain access to the same food rations and services as the rest of the population. The households can be supervised and supported by appropriate members of the community, such as leaders, members of childcare committees or community monitors.

It is best to try to find a family willing to take the children in, although it can be difficult since families tend to be less willing to take older children and often the older adolescents refuse this arrangement. In these cases, a family in the vicinity should be identified who is willing to be the children's sponsors or god-parents, and discussions should be held with them about the kind of regular support they agree to give the children. At a minimum, these community homes should make sure that the children attend school, get medical treatment when needed, access food and other rations they are entitled to and are included in some of the family's social gatherings. They must also be seen by the community as the children's protectors, particularly to prevent sexual and other abuse.

A similar arrangement can be made for older separated adolescents living on their own who do not want to live with a family or adolescents for whom no family can be found. In these cases, it is appropriate to help set up small adolescent group homes under the regular supervision of an animator or social worker who does not live with them but ensures that the young people are involved in school and/or other meaningful activities and generally supports them.

Care options for refugee children

The situation becomes more complex when unaccompanied or separated children are living in a refugee context where a durable solution to their refugee status also has to be sought. The preferred durable solution will always be voluntary repatriation and this should at all times be kept under review and actively pursued where appropriate. Where voluntary repatriation is not possible, local integration is likely to be the most appropriate alternative. Resettlement of separated children should be considered carefully on a case-by-case basis, only where other solutions are not appropriate. The possibility of eventual family reunification or voluntary repatriation should be kept open as long as possible.

Follow-up

Separated children in interim care are vulnerable to a host of ills, from discrimination to abuse. As such, the importance of following up on them is even more imperative than those who have been reunified. This is true regardless of the type of interim care they are in. Regular follow-up of separated children in interim care is critical, but determining the appropriate level can also be difficult. Consistent visits by caseworkers are often unrealistic due to costs, transportation and time. The most viable and meaningful follow-up is often one provided by a group or committee of community members who have agreed to monitor the situations of vulnerable children in their midst. These committees are generally set up in areas where interim care has been offered to separated children and programme social workers work through them, making short surprise visits to the families and the children once in a while. These visits should include open discussions with both family members and the foster children themselves, separately whenever possible so that both parties feel free to express concerns.

Experience indicates that systems for monitoring tend to decay over time, and there is currently a dearth of empirical information on the long-term wellbeing of children who are fostered in situations of emergency. Some foster families may not welcome caseworkers or even community-based monitors in their home following placement, and can sometimes be resistant to efforts to trace a child's family and achieve family reunification. Fostered children may also be vulnerable to further separation, during repatriation, for instance, and can have their place in the family questioned when difficult issues like access to land and inheritance arise. As a part of any foster care programme, efforts should be made to ensure the existence of a roster of several potential families who have already been oriented and are willing and ready to take in a separated child, should a child need to be removed from one placement and put in another.

It is important that efforts be made to ensure continued follow-up for as long as possible. Programme social workers should keep running logs on follow-up visits and meetings with community committees, to provide a comprehensive history of the child's care arrangements (see **Handout 3** for follow-up forms). As the child becomes older, and especially if the child is repatriated with their foster family, issues concerning the costs associated with education and possibly vocational training, and questions of inheritance and property rights will need to be carefully considered. The presence and support of caseworkers are often needed during this process.

Psychosocial support for all separated children

In addition to the destruction and violence experienced by all children in emergencies, those separated from their families also suffer the sudden loss of the most important people in their lives, many under brutal circumstances. The majority of separated children have had frightening experiences and are lonely and depressed. These feelings can sometimes manifest themselves in negative behaviours. Caregivers will frequently require help and advice to understand and respond to these behaviours.

It is important to consider what advice should be given to caregivers and how to determine a child's need for professional help. A significant number of separated children may exhibit psychosocial symptoms of distress soon after the separation and/or while they are in a poor care situation, but the symptoms and suffering disappear over time for the great majority of children if they are provided with loving, consistent care in an environment where they have access to developmental and recreational activities.

Some separated children are more quiet than usual, do not play much with other children, hardly ever smile or laugh and/or cry a lot. Other children are constantly getting into fights, are restless, loud and defiant. Some may have bad dreams, cry at night, wet their beds or cling to every adult they meet. These and other disturbing behaviours may be normal reactions to shocking or terribly sad experiences. They may indicate that the child is still grieving over the loss of family; troubled or even shocked by frightening experiences they have had; not getting the care and attention they need.

Different children may suffer from some or all of the above at different times. Others may suffer in silence. It is important, therefore, to provide support to all separated children, not only those with physical symptoms.

Providing support

Child-development professionals typically highlight three key elements in promoting recovery for separated children that are likely to reduce the need for specialised interventions. They are as follows.

1 Early intervention to meet the basic needs of children as soon as possible

2 Structured activities to restore a sense of normality

3 Basic care and nurturing

There are various examples of actions and activities that can be used to support these key elements, including but are not limited to the following.

Meeting basic needs

All children have the right to a home and family and efforts to establish this for separated children should be carried out as early as possible, meaning immediately after a child is identified and registered. In the best case scenarios, separated children are reunited with their families. Not all children, however, are fortunate enough. For those children who cannot be reunited with their families, it is important to provide alternative care that replicates what a family would have provided. Community-based care that builds upon local culture and provides continuity in learning, socialisation,

and development is the best form of alternative care for children who cannot be immediately reunified with their families.

Structured activities

Efforts should be made in all situations, including emergencies, to ensure that separated children participate in structured activities for recreation and continued learning. Older children should have access to education, including vocational training and their participation should be promoted and monitored. Preschool children should also be brought together for structured play during the day.

The provision of all forms of education should be **avoided** at centres providing interim care, as this can prompt parents to place their children in institutions, encouraging and even prolonging separation. Instead, separated children should attend local schools where available. If there are no locally available educational and skills-training opportunities, facilities provided to separated children should also be available to other children, again, to avoid encouraging separations among families who are desperate to enrol their children in educational programmes. Assistance with school fees and uniforms might also be provided, but careful consideration must be given to the role of the Ministry of Education in a particular area before doing so, to avoid taking over a responsibility of the State. In addition, if support of this kind is given, it should not be restricted to separated children alone.

For separated refugee children, special conditions should be arranged to ensure they return to their country of origin with school certificates or other proof of education obtained in the country of asylum.

Care and nurturing

For all children, being cared for by people that they know well and trust is critical to their psychological and social wellbeing. In addition to the family, care-workers and teachers also play a key role in promoting children's confidence, trust, and security. They require training in how to communicate with children, how to listen to them and how best to support them, including appropriate ways of responding to children who may have emotional and behavioural problems. In addition to promoting their wellbeing and development, relationships forged with care-workers and teachers may help children to communicate information that will assist with tracing.

In situations where there is still a need for specialised intervention, despite best efforts regarding the above, local resources should be explored and supported as long as they are in the best interests of the child.

For more information on psychosocial support see **Foundation module 7** Psychosocial support and **Foundation module 1** Understanding childhoods.

Advocacy

Advocacy is an important protection mechanism that has to be taken into consideration when implementing in programming for separated children, either conceived for prevention or as direct response to situation of separation that have already occurred. In many instances humanitarian agencies are unable to change a situation or achieve a result without the intervention of other actors in a position of power. Advocacy efforts seek to facilitate this intervention.

To support strategies to **prevent separation**, organisations can advocate for the following.

● Donors or other humanitarian actors to target resources to specific locations or populations likely to experience mass movement (based on results of assessment) and where separation is likely to occur. Often individual agencies may have limited resources but advocacy efforts can draw the attention of donors and other agencies to vulnerable locations and populations.

● Government and humanitarian actors to include strategies to prevent and respond to separation within emergency plans. Given the range of concerns during an emergency, it is possible that concerns about separation might be overlooked or not been considered a priority concern.

● Government and humanitarian actors to abolish or reduce humanitarian practices that might cause separation. Many agencies are unaware of the ways in which they put children at risk of separation. Similarly, they may be unaware of the dangers of separation.

● Donors, government, and humanitarian actors to provide and/or fund additional training for specific government, NGO and community leaders to prevent and respond to separation. Training requires resources, both financial and human, which may be in short supply during an emergency.

● Parents to register their children and/or government to establish simple and mandatory birth registration processes. Although humanitarian agencies cannot issue birth certificates but they can facilitate the process.

To support strategies to **respond to separation**, organisations can advocate for the following.

● Government and humanitarian actors to adopt common procedures and documentation for: identification, registration and documentation, tracing, verification, reunification, and follow-up to ensure minimum standards and facilitate collaboration. The Inter-agency child protection database provides a basis for these procedures and sample documentation.

● Government, humanitarian actors, and community leaders to provide interim care options that are in the best interests of the child. Often the best options include family or community-based care options rather than residential care or adoption.

● Government and community leaders to provide on-going follow-up support to reunited children or children placed in interim care. Follow-up can be carried out by agency staff, community or government staff. However, agencies may be required to advocate for the necessary financial and human resources as well as for appropriate standards and mechanisms for following up and monitoring.

● Government to establish national child protection systems and services to place and follow-up children in foster care. Foster care may be a new concept and establishing a foster care system might require significant changes to the existing child protection system in a country.

Advocacy actions should never forget to involve those who should benefit from the advocacy action, the children affected by separation and their communities, respecting the children's right to participate in matters that affect them. See **Foundation module 4** Participation and inclusion and **Foundation module 5** Advocacy.

Training material for this topic

Exercise 1   Identification and documentation

Exercise 2   Tracing

Exercise 3   Verification

Exercise 4   Agency coordination in working with separated children

Exercise 5   Prevention of separation

Exercise 6   Reunification

Exercise 7   The protection and care network

Handout 1   The child's story Part 1

Handout 2   The child's story Part 2

Handout 3   Inter-agency child protection database forms

Handout 4   Inter-agency child protection information management system April 09

Handout 5   Conducting interviews

Handout 6   Example data protection protocols for children

Topic 5
Monitoring, evaluation and learning

Key learning points

● Monitoring and evaluation should assess whether separated children are being appropriately protected through programme implementation or otherwise.

● Monitoring and evaluation should look at numbers of separated children identified (output) and number of identified children who have received appropriate support, including reunification (outcomes).

● A monitoring and evaluation system should be set up at the start of a programme for separated children that includes developing indicators, collecting, analysing and using data to improve support for separated children and their families.

● Data collected from programme interventions for separated children can be generated to inform national and international level monitoring and reporting on trends and concerns regarding separated children.

Monitoring is the ongoing tracking of the programme's implementation. Monitoring is a programme management function and serves the immediate information needs to be analysed and evaluated.

Evaluation is the collection and analysis of meaningful information to guide the implementation of a programme, but also to guide learning, decision making and practice.

'A monitoring and evaluation system (M&E) should be established at the beginning of programming in order to define the goals of the child protection programme and initiate the process of gathering and recording key information. Even in an emergency, child protection activities must assess the achievement of its objectives.' [26]

The separated children programmes need to be monitored and evaluated during the implementation of the project to ensure not only that they provide the services intended, but also to guarantee that those services are appropriate to achieve the objective of protecting the children who are suffering the separation or are at risk.

This topic provides guidance on the types of indicators that should be read alongside **Foundation module 3** Programme design, **Topic 5** which provides essential information about the different levels of monitoring and evaluation that should be considered; key principles and processes; and guidance around monitoring at national and international levels.

Conceptual framework

Separated children programmes need to develop a system to track the progress of intervention strategies that adopt rights-based approaches and lead to areas of change in:

● The practices of duty bearers, international and national agencies and national and local authorities, in terms of their identification of and response to separated children

● The support from civil society for changes for children's rights, particularly related to the CRC articles relevant to separation

● The capacity of rights holders, children themselves, to claim their rights, particularly related to the CRC article relevant to separation

This is not to say that each intervention will cover each of these areas, but it is useful to have a complete picture in mind when planning an M&E system.

Principles of rights-based monitoring and evaluation

Good monitoring and evaluation can provide essential information and analysis about whether the project is being implemented according to plan which is process monitoring, and whether change and impact result from the outputs; it's an ongoing check on good practice and an issue of management and accountability. Continuous monitoring and evaluation imply adjustments on the implementation to achieve the desired objectives led by the best interest of the child. A rights-based approach to monitoring and evaluation thus has implication both for **what** is monitored and evaluated; effort, effect and change, and the standards of the implementation processes used and **how** monitoring is done.

Where M&E fits into the bigger picture of change

At the beginning of a response, when separated children have been identified, further needs assessments have been completed and activities like family tracing and reunification are beginning, the monitoring system should focus on the output level, which looks at what has been done so far in terms of implementation of activities. As the situation moves from the initial response to later phases, it should be possible to see changes as a result of these activities, and new and/or different activities might be incorporated into the implementation. At this point, it should be possible to assess the outcomes of the work undertaken so far which looks at the use of outputs and sustained resolutions, and it may be necessary to incorporate new output indicators that are relevant to any new work that is starting. Some of the standard monitoring activities include follow-up visits to the children reunified or in foster care.

Any monitoring system will need to look at both the quantity as well as the quality of the outputs and outcomes, including whether these are meeting the needs of separated children as articulated by them.

Indicators

Each separated children programme will need to develop its own set of indicators for each level as appropriate that will help to measure and track both the activities that are being undertaken (outputs) and the objectives set (outcomes) for the programme. Indicators should be developed in conjunction with children and communities (see children participation below) to ensure these are relevant and meaningful to them, and with the involvement of staff that has direct contact with the target population as they will have a more realistic sense of what is relevant and feasible as well as ensuring their buy-in.

The output indicators around identification of and response to separation will be more relevant in the initial phases of the programme whereas how the responses are affecting the wellbeing of children and the appropriateness of the programme might not become relevant until later in the programme. This has implications for when it

would be appropriate to collect information about the different indicators and will also encourage the programme to carefully think about how it will use the information. Remember that collecting one round of outcome indicators at the beginning of the programme can set a baseline against which future progress can be compared. All indicators should be disaggregated by gender and age.

Indicators have to be developed concurrently with the objectives keeping in mind they have to help in measuring changes in the wellbeing of children affected by the programme. The development of adequate quantitative and qualitative indicators in the design of the programme will be a key to obtain data that will give the implementing agency and the communities relevant information to assess the outputs and outcomes of the programme and an indication of whether objectives are actually being met.

Quantitative indicators can be measured using numbers or percentages while qualitative indicators are based on observations, interviews and the perceptions of those affected by programming. Transforming qualitative indicators in quantitative ones (for example asking interviewees to assign numbers to the degree of satisfaction from 1 to 5) can be a useful tool to monitor implementation and to respond to donor demands, but the complexity of the field is obviously not easy to reduce to a numeric science.

Quantitative indicators may include:

- number of children placed in foster care

- number of separated children returned to families

- number of separated children attending school and community activities

- number of separated children registered

Qualitative indicators may include:

- reports by teachers on the school achievement of separated children

- anecdotal reports by families of the improved outlook of children

- children and foster families report satisfaction with arrangements

- overall reduction in disturbances involving separated children as reported by community leaders

- successful spontaneous care arrangements with minimal support.[27]

Developing data collection tools and processes

In order for data of good quality to be collected effectively, there must be a system with clearly delineated processes for how to do it. **Foundation module 3** Programme design, **Section 5** provides clear guidance on the steps that need to be taken to develop an M&E system, however, relating to separated children programming, any system would need to include the following.

- Tools for data collection (eg. direct observation, interviews, focus group discussions)

- Reporting formats for data collected (eg. registration forms, follow-up forms)

- A database system for storing data (eg. the Inter-agency child protection database)

● A protocol for data collection and storage which should also include data protection

Separated children programmes often work in a multidisciplinary and interagency manner and therefore it is important to have protocols on how information is being collected, shared and used.

Data analysis

Critical to successful monitoring in emergency situations is frequent and regular analysis of the data that has been gathered to assess the outputs and outcomes of the work and to improve the programme that ultimately should lead to improved wellbeing for children and fulfilment of their rights as well as needs. The process of analysis should make sure that data collected is being used and that the programme remains relevant. Involving children and communities in this process will increase the programme's potential for effectiveness and impact as well as empower them and increase the agency's accountability to them in the process.

Children's participation

See **Foundation module 4** Participation and inclusion

According to the CRC children have the right to express themselves and to be heard in matters that affect them. Ignoring child participation in the monitoring of the interventions intended to prevent or respond to family separation is a direct violation to the Guiding principle of participation stated in the CRC.

Children participation is not a one-off intervention by the children, but a continuous process that needs to be monitored. The degree and effectiveness of children participation will determine the quality of the monitoring of the programme implementation. Different methodologies can be used for ensuring this participation and its evaluation.

Community participation in monitoring and evaluation means the involvement of stakeholders and beneficiaries in a collective examination and assessment of project implementation. Child participation is a form of community participation. Unfortunately children are often bypassed when community participation approaches are introduced. Community participation has its roots in the same school of thought that motivates participatory development and stems from a similar dissatisfaction with top down aid and consultants who 'fly in and fly out' to assess change in a local context. But in separated-children programmes community participation refers mostly to child participation. Participation has been mainstreamed within the implementation of the programmes, but participatory monitoring and evaluation is also about self-reflection and empowerment, an integral part of measurement of impact and analysis of process. First, participation seeks to improve programme effectiveness by incorporating the input of children and other members of the community closely involved in or affected by implementation. It also seeks to build capacity to reflect on challenges confronting the programme and negotiate solutions amongst themselves. As with other participatory methods, the emphasis is on the process rather than the product of the evaluation. Children do more than provide information; they have to be actively involved in the implementation and programme adjustments. The goals and objectives of the community may change. Therefore adjustments must be made to the programme implementation.

'...during a tracing programme, large movements may occur, so new children will need to be registered and entered in the system; geographical areas not previously a part of the service may need to be included if they become accessible or other areas where tracing was being done may become inaccessible. Eventually efforts to trace on behalf of children will result in reunifications, or information may be exhausted.' [28]

Training material for this topic

Exercise 1   Monitoring and support for separated children

Handout 1   Case studies

Endnotes

1 Where the term **caregiver** is used in this module, it refers to the person exercising day-to-day care, whether parent, relative, family friend or some other person, including foster parents either taking in the child spontaneously or more formally through some kind of fostering scheme.

2 *Lives apart: family separation and alternative care arrangements during El Salvador's civil war* Sprenkels R, 2002 pp102 to 103

3 'Separated children in South Sudan' *Forced migration review* McCauley U, p52

4 *Inter-agency guiding principles on unaccompanied and separated children* ICRC, IRC, SCUK, UNICEF, UNHCR and WVI, 2004 p23

5 Convention on the rights of the child, 1990 http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm

6 For example, countries that ratified the International conference for the Great Lakes region that is the first regional international legal document that turns the principles into international law. Other countries like Colombia have also introduced the principles in their national legislation.

7 Also see *IRC lessons learned in Guinea Conakry* with standard forms and documents from Guinea Conakry experience; for access to the Inter-agency child protection database material contact the referred agencies. DevInfo is one of the most well known databases, created by UNICEF to standardise forms and data collection.

8 In addition to the Inter-agency child protection database that is used by INGOs, in refugee settings, UNHCR usually registers refugees using its own database, proGres. It contains a specific needs section with broad categories, including separated and unaccompanied children, that allow UNHCR to aggregate statistics consistently worldwide and to collect much more detailed information.

9 IDEM quote

10 *The 'rights' start to life: a statistical analysis of birth registration* UNICEF, Feb 2005

11 Some regional mechanisms are taking this problem seriously like the International conference for the Great Lakes region that recognises the problem and the need of regional cooperation for the regularisation of civil documentation, birth and marriage certificates to protect mostly women and children.

12 'Understanding the psychosocial needs of refugee children and adolescents' McCallin M *The refugee experience: psychosocial training module Volume 1* Loughry M and Ager A (editors) Refugee Studies Centre, Oxford 2001

13 http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNACS219.pdf

14 Also see *IRC lessons learned in Guinea Conakry* with standard forms and documents from Guinea Conakry experience; for access to the Inter-agency child protection database materials contact the referred agencies. DevInfo is one of the most well known databases, created by UNICEF to standardise forms and data collection.

15 However, this should not lead to 'refoulement' in the case of refugees. Article 33 of the 1951 Refugee convention states that '*No contracting State shall expel or return a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontier of territories where his life or*

freedom would be threatened on account of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.'

16 From NRC Training modules on internal displacement
http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwt.nsf/db900SID/LHON-5UZMKN?OpenDocument

17 *Family matters: the care and protection of children affected by HIV and AIDS in Malawi* Mann G, Save the Children p38

18 See Better Care Network
http://www.crin.org/bcn/

19 *The Rwandan experience of fostering separated children* Dona G,
Save the Children, 2001

20 See *Inter-agency guidelines on mental health and psychosocial support in emergency settings*; *Psychosocial care and protection of tsunami affected children guiding principles*
http://www.icva.ch/doc00001316.html

21 Fostering is a particularly sensitive issue and one that should be handled by trained and experienced personnel only; mistakes could have serious implications for a child's wellbeing.

22 See **Gatekeeping** on the Better Care Network website
http://www.crin.org/bcn/topic.asp?themeID=1003&topicID=1022

23 *'Someone that matters' The quality of care in childcare institutions in Indonesia* Save the Children, Indonesian Ministry of Social Affairs (DEPSOS), and UNICEF, 2007

24 UNICEF, Save the Children and others have specific policies on this that likely are the same

25 http://www.unicef.org/media/media_41918.html

26 *Introduction to child protection in emergencies, an interagency modular training package.* For more information see: ADD Humanitarian reform website, child protection page as reference. And need to double check this location before going to press.

27 *Separated children care and protection of children in emergencies: a field guide* Hepburn A, Williamson J and Wolfram T
http://www.savethechildren.org/publications/technical-resources/child-survival/SEPARATED_CHILDREN_CONTENTS.pdf

28 Ibid

Further reading

- *A last resort: the growing concern about children in residential care* Save the Children, London 2003

- *Applying the standards: improving quality childcare provision in East and central Africa* Save the Children, 2006

- *Assessment: separated children in South Sudan* UNICEF

- *Cartagena declaration on refugees* 1984

- *Community-based care for separated children* Save the Children, 2003

- *Convention governing the specific aspects of refugee problems in Africa* 1974

- *Convention on protection of children and cooperation in respect of inter-country adoption* 1995

- *Convention on the rights of the child* 1989

- *Convention relating to the status of refugees* 1951

- *Evacuation of children from conflict areas: considerations and guidelines* Ressler, Everett, UNHCR and UNICEF, Geneva 1992

- *Facing the crisis: supporting children through positive care options* Save the Children, 2005

- *Family tracing: a good practice guide* Bonnerjea L, Save the Children, London 1994 (Also available in French.)

- *Geneva conventions and their additional protocols* 1949 and 1977

- *Growing the sheltering tree: protecting rights through humanitarian action* IASC, Switzerland 2002

- *Guidance note on inter-country adoption in the CEE/CIS/Baltics region* UNICEF, February 2003

- *Guidelines for the protection and alternative care of children without parental care (draft)* UNICEF and ISS, 2006

- *Guidelines on policies and procedures in dealing with unaccompanied children seeking asylum* UNHCR, Geneva 1997

- *Guidelines on the formal determination of the best interests of the child* UNHCR, 2006

- *Guidelines on the protection of child victims of trafficking* UNICEF, 2006

- *Guiding principles on internal displacement* OCHA, 1998

- *Handbook for applying the Guiding principles on internal displacement* The Brookings Institute Project on internal displacement, 1999

- *HIV and conflict: double emergency* Save the Children Alliance, 2002

- *IASC Guidelines on mental health and psychosocial support in emergency settings* IASC, 2007

- *Implementing collaborative response to situations of internal displacement* IASC, September 2004

- Inter-agency child protection database, Save the Children, IRC, UNICEF, 2006

- *Inter-agency guidelines on separated and unaccompanied children*
  World Vision International, ICRC, UNHCR, Save the Children UK, IRC, UNICEF,
  Geneva 2004

- *Internal displacement: global overview of trends and development in 2006 and 2007*
  Norwegian refugee council and internal displacement monitoring centre

- *Keeping children with families in emergencies, presentations and background papers,
  London Save the Children, session one: prevention of separation; session three:
  fostering; session four: reunification and reintegration*
  Save the Children UK, London 1997

- *Keeping children with families in emergencies: report of an interagency meeting*
  Save the Children UK, London 1997

- *Let's talk: developing effective communication with child victims of abuse and human
  trafficking* UNICEF, 2004

- *Mobility mapping and flow diagrams: tools for family tracing and social reintegration
  work with separated children* USAID, 2003

- *Optional protocol to the Convention on the rights of the child on the involvement of
  children in armed conflict* 2000

- *PATH (a principled approach to humanitarian action) training programme*
  UNICEF, 2006

- *Priority action handbook for UNICEF and UNHCR field staff* UNICEF and UNHCR,
  Geneva

- *Promoting psychosocial wellbeing among children affected by armed conflict and
  displacement: principles and approaches* Save the Children Alliance, 1996

- *Protect or neglect: towards a more effective United Nations approach to the protection
  of internally displaced persons* The Brookings Institute Project on internal
  displacement, 2004

- *Refugee children: guidelines on protection and care* UNHCR, 1994

- *Refugee children: guidelines on protection and care* UNHCR, 1994 see chapter 10

- *Roofs and roots: the care of separated children in the developing world*
  Tolfree D, 1994

- *Separated children in Europe programme, statement of good practice, second edition*
  Save the Children and UNHCR, October 2000

- *Separated children in Europe programme, statement of good practice, third edition*
  Save the Children and UNHCR, July 2004

- *Separated children in Europe programme, training guide* Save the Children
  and UNHCR, 2001

- *Separated children: care and protection of children in emergencies*
  Save the Children US, 2004

- *The lost ones: emergency care and family tracing for children from birth to five years*
  UNICEF, April 2007

- *The Rwandan experience of fostering separated children* Save the Children, 2001

- *The needs of IDP women and children: guiding principles and considerations* UNICEF, 1998

- *Unaccompanied children: care and protection in wars, natural disasters and refugee movements* Ressler, Everett, Boothby and Steinbock, Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford 1998

- *UNHCR handbook for registration* UNHCR, New York 2003

- *UNHCR policy on adoption of refugee children* UNHCR, August 1995

- *Whose children? Separated children's protection and participation in emergencies* Save the Children Sweden, 2004

- *Working with separated children: a field guide* Uppard S and Petty C, Save the Children, London, 1998

- *Working with separated children training manual* Uppard S, Petty C and Tamplin M, Save the Children, London 1998

- *Working with separated children: field guide and training manual* Save the Children, January 2000

  Websites

- Better Care Network
  www.crin.org/bcn

- International Committee of the Red Cross
  www.icrc.org

- Save the Children UK
  (*Working with separated children: field guide and training manual* Save the Children, can be obtained via this site.)
  www.savethechildren.org.uk

- UNICEF
  www.unicef.org

Guidance for training on critical issues

All Critical issue modules follow the same pattern of five topics.

- **Topic 1** The issue for children
- **Topic 2** The law and child rights
- **Topic 3** Assessment and situation analysis
- **Topic 4** Planning and implementation
- **Topic 5** Monitoring, evaluation and learning

Anyone facilitating a training or awareness-raising event on a specific critical issue should refer to the recommended **key learning objectives** below for each of these topics. With each of the sets of learning objectives is a suggested **sequence of information** to be followed when tackling the topic, in order to ensure that the learning objectives are achieved.

Topic 1 The issue for children

Key learning objectives that participants should be able to:

- describe why and how this critical issue impacts on the lives and rights of children in humanitarian settings
- be motivated to address these issues effectively.

Sequence of information

1 What this critical issue covers (might include definitions, different situations, manifestations, interpretations).

2 How it impacts on children (at different ages and stages; in different situations; considerations of gender and exclusion).

3 Why it is important to respond.

Topic 2 The law and child rights

Key learning objectives that participants should be able to:

- cite and justify relevant legal instruments and standards in relation to this critical issue
- identify key duty bearers in relation to the issues addressed in this module
- cite and respect key guiding principles in addressing these issues.

Sequence of information

1 Relevant legal instruments and standards.

2 Relationship between duty bearers and rights holders.

3 Guiding principles.

Topic 3 Assessment and situation analysis

Key learning objectives that participants should be able to:

● describe why rights-based assessment and analysis are essential components of any programming in humanitarian environments

● develop a plan and process for assessment and/or analysis that is informed by rights-based principles and approaches; and which addresses the specific issues raised in a particular module

● identify challenges that they may face.

Sequence of information

1 Why assessment and analysis is essential

2 Difference between assessment and analysis and where each is appropriate

3 Core principles

4 Key tools

5 Challenges and opportunities

6 Plan for assessment and/or analysis

Topic 4 Planning and implementation

Key learning objectives that participants should be able to:

● describe principles and approaches that should be part of any and all implementation strategies

● reflect on how these approaches should apply to the different implementation strategies that address the issues raised in a situation analysis

● make informed decisions about which of these strategies to prioritise and how to implement them effectively.

Sequence of information

1 Relevant guiding principles:
   Working to common goals
   Coordinated approach
   Participation and inclusion.

2 Prevention and implementation strategies:
   The three pillars
   Monitoring and reporting on progress in achieving children's rights.

3 Prioritisation and operational guidance

Topic 5 Monitoring, evaluation and learning

Key learning objectives that participants should be able to:

- describe overall (dimensions of) change to which all child rights-based programmes are working

- describe how interventions proposed in relation to this critical issue contribute to this process of change

- develop relevant indicators of progress at output and outcome levels

- use participatory and inclusive approaches in gathering and analysing indicators.

Sequence of information

1 Overview of dimensions of change to which all child rights-based programmes are working.

2 Clarity about relationship between impact, evaluation and monitoring processes and indicators required at each level.

3 Development of sample indicators for each level.

4 Guidance about appropriate and inclusive methodologies for M&E.

Links to Foundation modules

It is important to refer to relevant Foundation modules when gathering information to support activities in relation to individual topics. The links between Critical issue topics and Foundation modules are outlined below.

- **Topic 1** The issue for children
  Foundation module 1 Understanding childhoods

- **Topic 2** The law and child rights
  Foundation module 2 Child rights-based approaches
  Foundation module 5 Advocacy

- **Topic 3** Assessment and situation analysis
  Foundation module 3 Programme design
  Foundation module 4 Participation and inclusion

- **Topic 4** Planning and implementation
  Foundation module 4 Participation and inclusion
  Foundation module 5 Advocacy
  Foundation module 6 Community mobilisation
  Foundation module 7 Psychosocial support

- **Topic 5** Monitoring, evaluation and learning
  Foundation module 2 Child rights-based approaches
  Foundation module 3 Programme design

For further guidance on developing and running training and awareness-raising events please refer to the **Training manual** and **Facilitator's toolkit** on the ARC resource pack CD-ROM.

Planning guide

Ideally anyone facilitating a training or awareness-raising event should work with a small planning group of resource people who have a good understanding of the local area and the targeted training group. They need to ensure that:

● they agree the best possible capacity-building intervention with the commissioning manager for the event

● they make rights **real** in any workshop, for example by building in field visits, showing relevant videos and DVDs, encouraging personal reflections and developing a workshop **bill of rights** with the participants

● they emphasise participation, inclusion and accountability at all stages.

The table below can be used when considering how best to present or enable participants to achieve the **key learning objectives** of each topic covered.

Sequence of information	Methodology eg. exercises, discussions	Comments eg. specific target groups