



# D) PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE TO HUMANITARIAN CRISES AND EMERGENCIES

How humanitarian crises and emergencies can drive the institutionalisation of children



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### How humanitarian crises and emergencies can drive the institutionalisation of children

**Humanitarian crises and/or emergencies place major strains on children and families, and communities' ability to support them.** These situations can trigger mass displacement, and threaten the health, safety and wellbeing of communities. Consequently, this can dramatically affect a family's ability to support their child's basic needs.

Section 1.5 highlights the pressures that the COVID-19 pandemic has placed on families and communities – affecting health, social and livelihood factors, and compounding discrimination and inequalities already present in care systems for children.



#### The impact of war on children deprived of family care: Ukraine

Before the escalation of the conflict in Ukraine, close to 100,000 children were confined to nearly 700 institutions across Ukraine. Already exposed to the harms of institutionalisation, deprived of a family environment, these children are highly vulnerable during the crisis.

Institutions have been targeted by shells and missiles. Many risk being cut off from supplies. As fighting intensifies, staff are fleeing and children risk being left to face the dangers of war, alone.

In some cases, groups of children from Ukrainian institutions have been evacuated and relocated to other countries, which makes it harder to keep track of their whereabouts. Many of them are travelling with staff from the institutions and therefore are recorded as accompanied by a legal guardian, which can lead to an unclear status with regards to their needs for care and protection. Although often misrepresented as 'orphans', the majority of these children have parents in Ukraine who may not have been informed about their relocation. Hundreds face the risk of re-institutionalisation upon arrival.

As the horror of the conflict unfolds, many more families are being torn apart amid the chaos. This can lead to children being separated from their parents or being made an orphan.

One of the most concerning elements of this fast-developing, multi-country crisis, is the delay in establishing a centralised, cross-country information management system to keep track of the whereabouts, safety and well-being of the nearly 100,000 children from Ukrainian institutions, as well as all other children and families fleeing the war.

This places children at greater risk of exploitation, trafficking and going missing.<sup>130</sup>

130 Hope and Homes for Children and partners. 'Key recommendations to uphold the rights of Ukrainian children deprived of family care', March 2022, [https://www.hopeandhomes.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/FINAL\\_Recommendations\\_Children-without-family-care\\_22032022.pdf](https://www.hopeandhomes.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/FINAL_Recommendations_Children-without-family-care_22032022.pdf)

As has been documented following the Tsunami of 2004 in Indonesia<sup>131</sup>, the earthquakes in 2015 in Nepal<sup>132</sup>, and in 2010 in Haiti<sup>133</sup>, at times, **institutions can become a major component of the international response to support vulnerable children.**

## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL



**By building the capabilities and resilience of families and communities, and addressing the root causes of family separation, the care reform process will contribute to the delivery of SDG11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.**

*11.b By 2020, substantially increase the number of cities and human settlements adopting and implementing integrated policies and plans towards inclusion, resource efficiency, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, resilience to disasters, and develop and implement, in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, holistic disaster risk management at all levels*



### Challenges faced by the Rohingya community in Cox's Bazaar Refugee Camps: Bangladesh

“During the displacement of the Rohingya community in 2017, many children were separated from their parents. Separation is also a risk within refugee camps due to their size and the lack of any identifying signage. Furthermore, there are child protection concerns in the camps due to many unaccompanied or abandoned children. The annual cyclones also increase the risk of separation. Due to COVID-19, all meeting spaces have been closed and children have a lot of free time. They are sometimes left unsupervised while parents work.”<sup>134</sup>

This proliferation of institutions during times of crisis creates countless risks for children. At times, the only way that children can access food, education and essential health services is in an institution, so parents will feel there is no other option but to place them there. In other instances, due to the major influx of international funding to support institutions, often in unregulated environments, children risk being ‘recruited’ into institutions; trafficked for the considerable financial benefit of the institution owners.

In a crisis institutions are often seen as a ‘temporary’ solution and, while well-intended, they become a long-term, established part of the care system, **locking up resources in buildings, rather than being directed towards keeping families and children together.**

131 DEPSOS and Save the Children. ‘A Rapid Assessment of Children’s Homes in post-Tsunami Aceh’ 2006.

<https://bettercarenetwork.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/A%20Rapid%20Assessment%20of%20Children%27s%20Homes%20in%20Post-Tsunami%20Aceh%20final.pdf>

132 Martin Punaks, Samjyor Lamya. ‘Orphanage Trafficking and Child Protection in Emergencies in Nepal: A Comparative Analysis of the 2015 Earthquake and the 2020 Covid-19 Pandemic’ Institutionalised Children Explorations And Beyond, 8(1), 2020. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/2349300320975547>

133 Lumos, ‘Orphanage Entrepreneurs: The Trafficking of Haiti’s Invisible Children.’ 2016.

[https://lumos.contentfiles.net/media/documents/document/2017/12/Haiti\\_Trafficking\\_Report\\_ENG\\_WEB\\_NOV16.pdf](https://lumos.contentfiles.net/media/documents/document/2017/12/Haiti_Trafficking_Report_ENG_WEB_NOV16.pdf)

134 Talisma Begum, Save the Children quoted in the Report of the 4th BICON on Alternative Care in Asia accessed at <https://www.hopeandhomes.org/blog/bicon/>

## **The role of humanitarian and emergency preparation and response in the care reform process**

While some crises are truly unpredictable, the majority are conceivable when we analyse the future impact of aspects such as climate change and conflict. Where relevant, **the care reform process needs to focus on two key areas: emergency preparedness and response.** The aim of which is to help to build the capabilities and resilience of families and communities, so they are better able to adapt to, and survive, crises.

**Emergency preparedness:** the care reform process must identify and establish the range of services needed to keep families together in a time of crisis. This can include a very broad range of aspects, ranging from providing vaccinations, to support kits, to access to emergency funds.

**Emergency response:** the process should analyse the suite of services that may be needed in a time of crisis to ensure that family unity is preserved. This could include family tracing, registration systems, the provision of adequate emergency family unit housing, and regulatory changes – such as prohibiting the establishment of independent institutions that are not registered with the government.

# KEY RECOMMENDATIONS: HUMANITARIAN CRISES AND EMERGENCIES

- ♥ Ensure that emergency preparedness strategies and activities are child-centred, identifying what is needed to strengthen the capabilities and resilience of families and prevent separation.
- ♥ Where possible, ensure that reactive, emergency responses are actioned in a way that builds on the existing system, avoiding the establishment of parallel systems of care, and minimising resources to 'temporary' forms of care and support, unless absolutely essential.
- ♥ Work to set up the necessary and possible family-based care structures in refugee settings<sup>135</sup>.
- ♥ In situations where temporary residential or institutional care is required, ensure that processes are put in place to ensure there is a short-term plan to get children back into families. This must be monitored and enforced.
- ♥ Ensure that emergency response strategies and activities are child-centred, identifying what services are needed to ensure that family unity is preserved or regained, such as family tracing or emergency family unit housing.
- ♥ Ensure that capacity is in place to monitor international funding in a time of crisis to avoid the establishment of institutions. This needs to be backed up by a robust registration and tracking system of children to reduce their vulnerability to child protection risks, such as trafficking.

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<sup>135</sup> Lumos. 'Protecting Unaccompanied children in a changing world: Strengthening family based care in refugee contexts' 2021. [https://lumos.contentfiles.net/media/documents/document/2021/12/LUMOS\\_Protecting\\_children\\_in\\_challenging\\_contexts\\_WEB.pdf](https://lumos.contentfiles.net/media/documents/document/2021/12/LUMOS_Protecting_children_in_challenging_contexts_WEB.pdf)