

Unaccompanied and Separated Children Information Sheet

The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action

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BACKGROUND:

While recognising the leadership of national governments and ministries in the care and protection of children on their territory, this information sheet serves as a guidance to different actors intervening in an emergency context to prevent family separation and ensure that unaccompanied and separated children are safe and receive appropriate services. Note that the information sheet does not in any way supersede existing national legislation and policy regarding unaccompanied and separated children. In line with the Inter-Agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children¹ and the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action,² the child protection sector commits to **prevent and respond to family separation** through identification and documentation of unaccompanied and separated children, and tracing and reunification with families. When temporary care is needed, the child protection sector promotes **family-based and community-based care**, as opposed to institutional care, as per the **child's best interest**.

PURPOSE/AUDIENCE:

This information sheet is designed to be adapted and re-issued in a number of different formats for a range of audiences, such as: child protection and non-child protection service providers (government or government-mandated), including civil society and humanitarian actors in key locations or who are able to identify children through their own service provision; community members; family members; and children themselves. Contextualisation efforts will need to take into account the specific audience that the information sheet is being prepared for, and it is recommended that individual tools are developed for different audiences.

¹ [Inter-Agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children | International Committee of the Red Cross \(icrc.org\)](https://www.icrc.org)

² [Child Protection Minimum Standards Working Group | The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action \(alliancecpha.org\)](https://www.alliancecpha.org)

CONTEXTUALISATION:

This information sheet is designed to be adapted for use in individual countries or possibly for specific movement corridors between countries. Key areas of text that need to be contextualised are highlighted in **blue**. Efforts to contextualise the information sheet may include conducting or reviewing data from field visits and assessments, including discussions with affected populations to understand their situation and what information would be helpful to them. A template section for information on local service providers for referrals is provided at the bottom of the tool.

Resources that may be useful to refer to during the contextualisation process include:

- [Field Handbook on Unaccompanied and Separated Children](#)
- [Toolkit on Unaccompanied and Separated Children](#)
- [Alternative Care in Emergencies \(ACE\) Toolkit](#)
- [Guidelines on Supervised Independent Living for Unaccompanied Children](#)
- [Guidance for Alternative Care Provision During COVID-19](#)
- [Ukraine Ministry of Social Policy Guidance on Border Crossings for Children, Those with Disabilities, and Those Accompanying Them](#)
- [Child Protection Response in Ukraine and Neighbouring Countries Drop Box of Resources](#)
- [UNICEF Guidance on Protecting Displaced and Refugee Children in and Outside of Ukraine](#)
- [Short Volunteer Guide: Volunteers Support Children and Adults Feeling the War in Ukraine | ChildHub - Child Protection Hub](#)

1. KEY MESSAGES FOR **SERVICE PROVIDERS** ON PREVENTING FAMILY SEPARATION, FAMILY TRACING AND REUNIFICATION (FTR), AND ALTERNATIVE CARE³

If you come across an unaccompanied⁴ and/or separated⁵ Child:

- **If a child is alone, DO NOT assume the child is lost or unaccompanied.** The parent/caregiver may be close by. Verify whether the child is lost, unaccompanied,

³ **Alternative care.** Alternative care is care for children outside of their parents or usual legal or customary caregiver. When temporary care is needed, the child protection sector promotes **family-based and community-based care**, as opposed to institutional care, as per the **child's best interest**.

⁴ **Unaccompanied child.** Unaccompanied children are those 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. A child who is alone or with other children (for example, in a child-headed household) is clearly unaccompanied. However, if a child is in the care of adults who are not relatives, an understanding of local law or custom is necessary.

⁵ **Separated child.** Separated children are separated from both parents, or from their previous primary or customary caregiver, but not necessarily other relatives. These may, therefore, include children accompanied by other adult family members. Generally, the term "previous legal or customary caregiver" refers to the person with whom the child lived and by whom he/she was cared for prior to the emergency, without necessarily implying legal responsibility.

or separated by asking the child and asking people nearby if they know the child. Unless there is imminent danger, remain at that location with the child. This is in case someone is looking for the child.

- **DO NOT separate children from parents, family members, siblings, or trusted adults they are travelling with, unless you have reasons to believe that the child is at imminent risk.**

Guidance for non-child protection service providers:

- **Physically link the child in need of immediate support (unaccompanied or at-risk children, which may include separated children) to the appropriate child protection service provider (TO BE CONTEXTUALISED to actor responsible for providing this specific service, such as a child protection agency, UN agencies, and other humanitarian organisations providing child protection services). Children who are separated but without additional risk factors can be linked through a standard, non-urgent referral.**
- **Do not leave an unaccompanied or at-risk child before they have been linked to the appropriate child protection service provider.** (See definition of unaccompanied children and associated consideration below.)
- For unaccompanied children who are without adult care, this linkage means ensuring they have physical care and protection by an appropriate actor **(TO BE CONTEXTUALISED: may include reference to emergency foster care, transit centre, or other care options depending on the context).**
- For children who are with an accompanying adult, unless there are reasons to believe that they are at imminent danger there is no need to physically link the child to a child protection service immediately. You can share relevant contacts with the child and caregivers in case it is needed later. However, you should record basic data on the child and their caregivers and share it with authorised child protection services as soon as possible **(TO BE CONTEXTUALISED: add an agreed format e.g., a “rapid” registration form or list here which information should be recorded).**
- **Ensure that referrals to service providers are done in an ethical and safe manner using the referral form (TO BE CONTEXTUALISED: add a referral form used in the location).**
- **Inform the child of what will happen next (TO BE CONTEXTUALISED: where possible, giving them/their caregiver — or any accompanying adult in the case of unaccompanied children — a copy of the registration or referral form and details of the service provider that their case has or will be referred to).**

Note: Alternative care placement must be facilitated by authorised service providers, guidance on which will be given as a continuation of this information sheet, but some resources are provided below.

Guidance for child protection service providers:

- Assess immediate risks (environmental, abuse, exploitation) and act where necessary.
- Ask the child for their ‘biodata’ for registration (and family tracing if needed) **(TO BE CONTEXTUALISED: using the standard registration form adopted in your context, or the rapid version, if possible)**.
- If a child is unable to provide information (e.g. they are too young or have a disability), ask whether anyone around has information, and record any details that may help with tracing. Take the necessary contact information of those who may know about the child’s history or journey. Keep the child’s clothes and belongings with her/him as these might help in tracing the child’s family. Record any detail no matter how irrelevant it may seem. **Note: Standard forms for this group of children (children under five) are available for adaptation locally.**
- Link the child to the appropriate service provider **(TO BE CONTEXTUALISED to actor responsible for providing this specific service, such as a child protection agency, border police, local municipality, UN agencies, and other humanitarian organisations, including the Red Cross and International Committee of the Red Cross [ICRC], and consular services in neighbouring countries)**.
- For unaccompanied children and any separated children that have been identified as “high risk” **(TO BE CONTEXTUALISED: can include guide timeframe for this e.g. within 24 hours or less, depending on risk levels)**, share the child’s “biodata” for registration with the responsible service provider and organise the next steps.
- **(TO BE CONTEXTUALISED):**
 - For separated children who want to continue moving (and unaccompanied children who are permitted by the authorities to continue moving e.g. where the parent has authorised someone to accompany them), document the relationship with their caregiver/accompanying adult, screen immediately for risks, and register the child for tracing where needed (and sign post them to other services in the intended destination country/region).
 - For those who wish to remain in the country:
 - For separated children: Document the relationship with their caregiver, screen immediately for risks, and, where needed, register the child for tracing and refer them to other services.
 - For unaccompanied children see the point above: *Do not leave an unaccompanied child before they have been linked to the appropriate service provider.*

Safe movement of children between border crossings and reception centres:

- **DO NOT allow unaccompanied children to be relocated between border crossings to reception centres in unofficial transportation.** Transportation should be provided by authorised service providers only, using trained and vetted staff.
- Upon arrival at reception centres, while waiting for safe and authorised onward transport or alternative care placement, unless there is immediate risk of harm or threat to life, children should be accommodated in an appropriate (safe, warm, and child-friendly) space away from unknown adults, where basic immediate child protection services are available, including screening for specific needs.
- All service providers organising transport to reception areas and onward movement must have a manifest to record all passengers, including basic information for each passenger (such as full name, sex, age, and any specific needs) as well as arrival point (e.g., which border crossing, date, and destination - even if tentative). Where possible, consent from parents/caregivers should be sought for transporting unaccompanied children.

- **DO NOT** remove the child from the location or an existing care arrangement unless he/she is at immediate risk.
- **DO NOT** allow unaccompanied children to be relocated between border crossings to reception centres in unofficial transportation, or without being on the manifest.
- **DO NOT** promise the child that you will find his/her parents or caregiver.
- **DO NOT** leave a child on his/her own without an appropriate focal point from the appointed service provider.
- **DO NOT** share information about the child with anyone else aside from the competent authorities and/or their appointed service provider(s) in the country responsible for UASC.
- **DO NOT** reunify an unaccompanied child with an adult claiming to be their legal or customary caregiver before verifying family links (using the standard forms adopted in the context).

Guidance on the relocation or evacuation of children from institutions across an international border:

- Many children living in institutional care and boarding schools have living relatives or legal guardians. As institutions seek to move children to safety, special measures must be taken in the best interest of the children. The consent of their parents or persons responsible for their care must be granted.
- Moving children to safety must not hinder their prospect for family reunification in the future.
- **Abide by Government Decree #166, 28 February 2022.**⁶

⁶ [Про внесення зміни до Правил перетинання державного кордону громадянами України | Кабінет Міністрів України \(kmu.gov.ua\)](#)

- Private entities and individuals facilitating evacuations have a **duty to seek authorisation** from and to coordinate with the **institution's director**, the **legal representative** of the children, the representative of the **local guardianship authority**, or the **military administration**.
- Children should travel with their **individual files** (e.g., passports, birth certificates, parents' and relatives' details, institutions' addresses) and any other relevant material likely to help with restoring family links and facilitating family reunification. If originals are not available, copies of key documents can also help. If the child or accompanying adults have phones, pictures of key documents should be taken and stored safely (password protected) on the phone in case of loss of originals and, if possible, backed up on email.
- Private entities and individuals facilitating these evacuations have a duty to **report to Consular Authorities** for the children's registration within one working day of arriving in the country of destination.
- Private entities and individuals who have taken responsibility for these children have an obligation to **cooperate with competent child protection authorities** in neighbouring countries.⁷ Cooperation with competent authorities entails supporting and promoting reunification with parents when in the child's best interests, and the provision of temporary appropriate care in the meantime. Failure to self-report to competent authorities, out of negligence or intentionally, exacerbates children's exposure to risks of permanent family separation, trafficking, abuse, neglect, and violence, including gender-based violence. It also exposes private entities and individuals responsible for the children to the country of origin and neighbouring countries' police scrutiny.
- **Children from institutions are not to be considered for national or international adoption. Adoption is not an appropriate form of care during or immediately after emergencies, as reunifying a child with her/his family can take several years.**
- Until the situation and wishes of a child's parents, previous primary caregivers, and other close relatives can be verified by the competent authorities (which may require support from a specially mandated agency for restoring family links e.g., the Central Tracing Agency of the ICRC), each child from an institution is considered to have living close relatives.
 - Where possible, children should be evacuated with their legal guardians (staff from the institutions and the families of these staff). This is because children who are registered in institutions are under the legal care of the institution and their staff. Furthermore, for most of these children the staff of the institution are also their main attachment figures and

⁷ For government contact details and relevant information, please check <https://help.unhcr.org/>

therefore central to their sense of safety and well-being. They should therefore be supported to travel together where possible within the law.

- Private entities and individuals planning to evacuate children from institutions should only do so if there is an imminent risk to their safety.

2. KEY MESSAGES FOR **CHILDREN**⁸ ON PREVENTING FAMILY SEPARATION, FAMILY TRACING AND REUNIFICATION (FTR), AND ALTERNATIVE CARE

- Memorise and write down your name, the address of your home, and both your parents'/carers' names and phone/WhatsApp numbers, so you can remember them.
- Make an identity tag with your full name, phone number, and the address to which you will be returning.
- If possible, write/learn the phone/WhatsApp numbers of three to five trusted people who live in different locations and may be able to care for you. A tag can be attached to your clothes or a necklace. Place it inside a case or small plastic bag to protect it from water and wear.
- In addition to your original travel documents, travel with pictures of your documents (IDs, passports, birth certificates, family booklets, etc.) in your phone and, if possible, backed up on email.
- Agree with all family members on a meeting point in the event of separation or if you cannot return home.
- Plan ways to keep your family together in a crowd (such as call-and-response songs involving each family member) and bring a rope or long scarf to secure your siblings to you to prevent separation if needed.
- When you leave, go together as a family. Do not leave alone.
- Agree with your parents/caregivers that if they are separated from you, you will immediately ask for help from relatives, other known and trusted adults, or trusted and responsible organisations **(TO BE CONTEXTUALISED)**. Learn the logos and names of these organisations so you can remember where to go for help.
- If you leave home, tell your parents/caregivers where you are going and when you will be back.
- If someone offers you a ride on transport, you can say no. Try to only go or travel with other family members or an adult you know and trust.
- BEWARE of employment or educational offers, particularly if they involve pressure to make an immediate decision or commitment and/or require splitting up from your family or friend group. Certain types of employment offer (such as modelling, waitressing, and nanny/au pair work) and/or offers that make promises of a high

⁸ For younger children and children with disability, this guidance can be provided to caregivers.

salary or luxurious life are often a trick. NEVER leave your key documents, such as passports, ID cards, or birth certificates, with a stranger.

If you get separated from your parents/caregivers:

- Try to find someone you know and trust **(TO BE CONTEXTUALISED: such as a relative, neighbour, or teacher)** who may be able to find appropriate people who can help you.
- Approach appropriate service providers **(TO BE CONTEXTUALISED)** and tell them you are lost, alone, or need help. This help should be given for free — no one has the right to touch you or ask favours from you in exchange for help.
- If you lose your parents/caregivers, stay with your siblings (if you are lost together). Look for other parents and children you know and tell them you have lost your family.
- If you have just lost your family, try to stay near the area where you were with them last, if it is safe and possible. If you move with other people, tell the appropriate service provider **(TO BE CONTEXTUALISED)** where you have gone.
- If you and your parents have already agreed on a meeting location, in the case of anyone getting lost, tell only people you trust and the appropriate service provider, so they can help you get there.
- Try to keep the clothes, jewellery, blankets, or anything else that your family saw you with last; these might help you and your family find each other again.

3. KEY MESSAGES FOR CAREGIVERS AND COMMUNITIES ON PREVENTING FAMILY SEPARATION, FTR, AND ALTERNATIVE CARE

Before leaving or on the way:

- Teach children their name, the address of their home, and both parents'/carers' names and phone numbers.
- Prepare an identity tag for your youngest children with their full name, your names, and all your contact details, including phone numbers, your original address, and any planned destination addresses. You can put this tag as a label on their clothes, or as a necklace or bracelet. Place it inside a case or small plastic bag to protect it from water and wear.
- Agree with all family members on one or several meeting points in the event of separation.
- Plan ways to keep your family together in a crowd (such as call-and-response songs involving each family member, or bring a rope / long scarf to secure your child to you).

- If a child lives in a residential institution or boarding school, bring your child home before leaving.
- When you leave, go together as a family. Avoid sending your children ahead.
- Tell your children — even the older ones — that if they are separated from you, to immediately ask the appropriate service provider **(TO BE CONTEXTUALISED)** for help. Help them learn the name and logo of this organisation/these organisations **(TO BE CONTEXTUALISED)**.
- During movement, make sure your children stay close to you.
- Hold on to the children's hands. Use a scarf or rope to connect them to you if needed. Carry the smallest children in a carrying pack to leave your hands free. Remind older children to hold hands with their younger siblings.
- Beware of unknown people offering to take care of your child, or offering jobs.

If you come across an unaccompanied and / or separated child:

- If you find a child alone, unless there is imminent danger, do not move the child from the location without first asking whether anyone knows the child or his/her family.
- If possible, identify where the child comes from (including specific information such as village/ town/city name, province, and area or region of their home country).
- Do not remove objects, documents, or clothing found with the child and immediately contact the appropriate service provider **(TO BE CONTEXTUALISED)** to help decide what to do to care for the child, and if needed trace the child's family.

If you become separated or lose a child in your care:

- Tell a representative of the appropriate service provider **(TO BE CONTEXTUALISED)**. That person should be able to record information about your child, link you to appropriate support, and advise on next steps. This should include registering the child as missing to enable matching with any requests for family tracing the child may make or be registered for by an appropriate service provider.
- If the child has just been lost, stay where you are to maximise the chance that your child will find you if he/she returns.
- If it is clear the child is not nearby, try to reach your family's agreed meeting point as your child may be ahead of you. Share information about your meeting point with the appropriate service provider, who will try to link you to your child through family tracing.
- It is always safest to travel with someone you know and trust. However, if you are in a situation where you need to get in a car with someone you do not know, take a picture of the licence plate, and send it to a family member/friend. Let this person know where you are going and approximately what time you expect to arrive.

ALTERNATIVE CARE

This information sheet does not provide key messages for alternative care. General recommendations on best practices related to alternative care in crises can be found in the document [Guidance for Alternative Care Provision During COVID-19](#). This guidance will be adapted to the country context. It includes information and recommendations about alternative care options and considerations when using them. The [ACE Toolkit](#) provides considerations for establishing and supporting different forms of alternative care as well as a series of tools to support this. UNHCR’s [Guidelines on Supervised Independent Living for Unaccompanied Children](#) provide considerations for supporting independent living of older unaccompanied children.

SERVICE PROVIDERS REFERRAL MAPPING

(TO BE CONTEXTUALISED: if referral pathway is not available in the location, contextualised versions of this information sheet may benefit from including contact information on authorised service providers referenced within the document.)

Service	Service Provider Name	Location	Contact Email	Contact Number	Additional Information (e.g., opening hours, criteria)

Acknowledgements:

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