# MEASURING SEPARATION IN EMERGENCIES

# A population-based estimation in Haiti following Hurricane Matthew

## SUMMARY

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Families are the basic protective unit for children in society and, in almost all cases, provide the best environment for meeting a child's developmental needs. The separation of children from their families is one of the most significant impacts that humanitarian crises have on individuals' lives worldwide. Identifying safe and supportive interim care for children, and carrying out family tracing and reunification activities to reunite them with their family following a rapid-onset emergency, are two of the most significant protective and psychological interventions that humanitarian actors can carry out during an emergency.

## Background to Measuring Separation in Emergencies

The Measuring Separation in Emergencies (MSiE) project is an interagency initiative under the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, funded by the USAID Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) and coordinated by Save the Children in partnership with Columbia University. The overall aim of the MSiE project is to strengthen emergency response programmes for unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) through the development of practical, field-tested approaches to enhance the assessment of the scale and nature of separation in emergencies.

To address this gap in data on UASC, in 2014 the Assessment and Measurement Task Force of the Global Child Protection Working Group (CPWG)[1] launched an interagency initiative to develop a project to generate rigorous statistics about UASC across a range of emergency settings. The project had several components each of which had specific methods to measure separation. Three components were initially explored with a fourth component, the residential care approach, being included following the initial pilots in 2014:

1. **Projection approach** aims to use existing population data from a given location, combined with empirical data from comparable emergencies, to generate models of UASC risk profiles characteristic of certain emergency types and phases, and to test or validate those projections against actual data in existing or evolving emergencies.

2. **Population-based estimation approach** aims to provide a population-based estimation of the prevalence, number and basic characteristics of UASC in a defined area, affected by the same emergency, at any given point in time.

3. **Community-based monitoring approach** incorporates a community-based monitoring system capable of continuous, ongoing measurement of trends in the frequency and basic characteristics of UASC in defined areas over time.

4. **Residential care approach** is designed to capture the scale of movements of children into residential care facilities as a result of an emergency.

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[1] Later renamed the Assessment, Measurement and Evidence Working Group upon transition from the CPWG to the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action in 2016.

This report focuses primarily on the population-based estimation approach, developed by Columbia University, and the field-testing of this approach in the Sud Department of Haiti from February to March 2017. The Save the Children International office in Haiti hosted the pilot research.

## Sampling and methodology

Sampling was achieved via a two-stage cluster design. Assuming precision of 1.5% and a response rate of 100%, it was estimated that the study would need 35 clusters of 23 households per cluster to detect a 5% prevalence of separation in a population of 775,000 people (the population of the Sud Department). The sample was increased to 28 households per cluster to achieve adequate power with an expected household response rate of 80%. In other words, it was assumed that 20% of households would choose not to participate, would be empty at the time of visit, or would not include anyone above the age of 18.

For the first stage, clusters were selected at the section level using the probability proportionate to size (PPS) method. PPS calculations were based on 2015 population estimate data from the Haitian Institut de Statistique et d'Informatique, which included estimates for each of the 69 sections within the 18 communes of Sud. For the second stage, houses within each cluster were selected via systematic random sampling. Using Google Earth satellite images, areas of 90–150 households within each cluster were randomly chosen and all households in the selected area were numbered. A sampling interval $m$ was determined by dividing the total number of households in the selected area by 28. A random number between 1 and the sampling interval value was used to select the first household. Each following household (depending on the day and the number of households in each location) was selected in a systematic fashion using the sampling interval $m$ (ie, every 4th house with an interval of 4) to achieve a sample that was distributed across the full area of households.

Two teams of eight data collectors were trained and visited households over the course of four weeks. At each household, the enumerator would speak with the female head of household or, if necessary, another adult. Respondents consented to participate and were then asked about the individuals living in their household and those who had left since the hurricane, with a particular emphasis on whether any children had a change in caregiver in that time. Respondents were also asked about the composition of their neighbour's home.

In a small number of households, secondary adult respondents were interviewed to compare their answers with the female head of household.
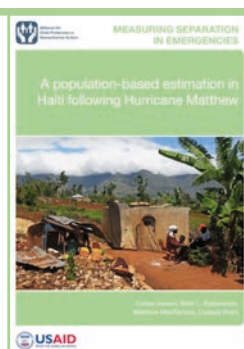
## Findings

The findings from Haiti have important implications for child protection programming following natural disasters. The primary outcome of interest was the prevalence of unaccompanied and separated children in the Sud Department in the 5-month period following Hurricane Matthew. A total of 1,044 primary households were surveyed. The sample of households totalled 1,175, giving a response rate of 88.5%.

Out of a total of 2,046 children living in the surveyed households at the time of data collection, 3.03% (n=62) had been separated following Hurricane Matthew, meaning they had either arrived in the household after the emergency or experienced a change in caregiver during this time. The low levels of separation in Haiti illustrate families' capacity for resilience in this specific setting. Overall, the findings emphasise the importance of collecting population-based data about local separation patterns whenever possible and avoiding the use of unproven 'rules of thumb' to generalise about separation in a given situation. Future iterations of this approach will contribute to an improved global understanding of how the complex patterns and drivers of separation vary according to different emergency typologies.

The lessons learned and recommendations as a result of piloting the population-based estimation approach in Haiti include:

- To the extent possible, conduct the population-based estimation across as much of the emergency-affected area as possible.
- Although the neighbourhood method produced inconclusive results in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Haiti, continue to pilot the method in additional settings.
- Electronic data collection saves time and improves data quality compared with paper data collection and therefore should be used whenever appropriate resources are available.

Copies of the full report – part of a series on pilots of tools developed under the OFDA-funded Measuring Separation in Emergencies Project, implemented by Save the Children and Columbia University on behalf of the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action – are available from savethechildren.org.uk and alliancecpha.org