



Child Protection Blueprint A Fair Deal for Refugee Children

“**Inclusion**” is when refugee children’s rights are respected, without discrimination, in law and practice, including their ability to access national services. Due to their unique status as refugees, child refugees often have specific legal, child protection or social welfare needs. Both UNHCR and UNICEF strongly support the long-standing consensus that States are obligated to protect the rights of all children, including asylum-seeking and refugee children. Working in partnership with governments is key to this approach.

What is the Blueprint for Joint Action?

The Blueprint for Joint Action focuses on streamlining the approach to serving refugee children. It also reaffirms UNICEF and UNHCR’s long-standing commitment to work with governments of refugee-hosting countries—and with each other and our partners—to increase inclusion, strengthen national child protection systems, and support States to provide for

all children in their territory. UNHCR and UNICEF’s partnership prioritizes human rights and community-based approaches to programming and accountability to affected populations. All stakeholders’ efforts to implement the Blueprint also fulfill the Sustainable Development Goals’ commitment “to leave no one behind”.

The commitment of the child protection sector

The 10 Blueprint countries are home to 2.24 million refugee children – over 20 per cent of the global total. In the Blueprint, UNICEF and UNHCR identified four priority areas for joint action that can significantly improve access to quality child protection for both refugees and host communities:

1. National child protection systems have increased capacity to respond to the needs of refugees and host communities.
2. Countries have increased access to birth registration for refugee and returnee children.

3. Humanitarian and national actors are better able to provide interventions for gender-based violence in emergencies (GBViE).

4. Family and community support systems are better able to provide mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) activities and child protection with meaningful participation of children and caregivers.

Strengthening inclusion in national child protection systems

For the past year, UNHCR and UNICEF have been developing a toolkit to assess and strengthen the inclusion of refugee children in national child protection systems – called the Mapping Toolkit on Inclusion of Refugee Children in National Child Protection Systems. The Mapping Toolkit will allow UNHCR, UNICEF, and government partners to assess the extent to which asylum-seeking and refugee children are currently included in national child protection systems and the capacity of these systems to respond to their needs and identify opportunities to strengthen inclusion. As part of these assessments, countries will build on existing entry points such as World Bank refugee protection assessments, national annual budget processes, or the development of national child protection guidelines, etc.

Why focus on inclusion? Strengthening inclusion has the dual benefit of enhancing the protection of refugee children, while also contributing to strengthening national child protection systems that benefit all children.

What does inclusion mean concretely? Inclusion means refugee children have access to child protection services, and that national laws and policies do not discriminate against refugee children. Key questions to measure inclusion include:

- Are laws and policies inclusive and non-discriminatory towards refugee children?
- Is governance and coordination active and sufficient between the national and refugee systems, including at the local level?
- For minimum standards and oversight, do data collection and monitoring systems include refugee children? Is this information age, gender, and (dis)ability disaggregated?
- Are there sufficient human, financial & infrastructure resources available for quality, appropriate services for refugee children? For the national children?

- Do data collection and monitoring systems include refugee children? Is this information disaggregated?
- Are there mechanisms for active child participation & community engagement of refugees in the asylum/refugee system? At the community level? Are there simple, accessible ways for children, their families & communities to input into these mechanisms?
- Are a full range of services available to asylum seeking and refugee children where they live?
- Are there any barriers to access the services? (i.e. example procedural, physical, language, discrimination)
- Are the services affordable? (Are there any hidden costs that act as a barrier for access to key CP services?)
- Do refugee families and communities know about the CP services? Are the CP services acceptable and do families agree to access these services (i.e. language, attitudes, etc.)?
- Are the appropriate services available for asylum seeking and refugee children?

What are key barriers to inclusion and how can these be addressed? Refugee children may not be included in policy and legislation (they may not be eligible to access national services). Sometimes the national child protection system is not well developed and has limited capacity. The national child protection system may already be overstretched and lack the capacity to serve refugee children, or even national children.

Depending on how developed the national child protection system is, and the capacity of the system we can then assess questions of access and appropriateness of the system (language, proximity of services, etc.). The interconnectedness of different sectors/domains can hinder inclusion. For example, refugee children may be unable to access available services because they do not have freedom of movement, access to identity documents, etc.

How to scale up inclusion? All over the world, governments, civil society and UN organisations have been working to include refugees in national systems and strengthen the capacity of these systems. UNHCR and UNICEF have worked over the last year to document these existing good practices, share



experiences across countries and regions, and undertake capacity building with regional and country level colleagues in the Americas, Asia, and a global reference group. The inclusion toolkit is now being rolled out in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ethiopia (a Blueprint country), Romania, South Africa and Uganda. The Mapping Toolkit will be finalized by the end of the 2021.

UNICEF and UNHCR have identified opportunities for better integration of refugee children into national child protection and social welfare systems including:

- Ensuring that national legal frameworks are addressing child friendly refugee procedures;
- Tapping into national development plans;
- Catering for refugee children in national child protection policies and standards;
- Ensuring that the child protection workforce is capacitated to address the needs of refugees;
- Considering refugee communities in national surveys and research; and
- Strengthening the capacity of birth registration systems to facilitate access for refugee children;

Many countries have shown it is possible. In **Finland**, the Asylum system is generally child-friendly and follows detailed guidelines on the best interest of the children that were developed by Finnish Immigration Services.

In **Honduras**, the government trained migration officials at border points to strengthen the protection of refugee and migrant children and is now scaling this across the civil service. The **Kenyan government** has long-since embraced their responsibility towards all children. Department of Children's Services (DCS) staff are based in refugee camps, and DCS staff from the capital carry out joint missions with UNICEF and UNHCR to assess needs and the services being provided.

[Increasing access to birth registration](#)

One of the goals of the Joint Action Plans developed in Blueprint countries was to ensure all refugee children's access to birth registration services. Towards that goal, UNHCR and UNICEF hoped to secure birth registration for 36,000 newborn refugees by 2021. To date, **over 16,000 births** of refugee children were registered in 3 countries: Indonesia, Iraq and Ethiopia. Despite these advances, globally the percentage of refugee children whose births are registered has decreased – in 2015, 44% of UNHCR operations working on birth registration reported a satisfactory number of children below the age of 12 months having access to birth certificates while in 2020 this had dropped to 25%. National birth registration systems need support in refugee hosting areas to scale up services including mobile or outreach services, to simplify procedures to remove barriers for refugee children to have their births registered and to provide refugee families with information and where needed, legal advice on how to register births.

Providing child protection and GBV services

Strengthening child protection systems takes time, commitment and long-term investments. While working towards inclusion, UNHCR and UNICEF are also committed to supporting supplementary services for refugee children. The Blueprint set a goal of reaching an additional 100,000 children with community-based child protection and services by 2021. So far, **over 172,000 children**, adolescents and caregivers received community-based mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) and child protection services in Iraq, Bangladesh and Lebanon alone. Another success of the Blueprint was that 100% of the targeted refugee children at risk and unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) in Ethiopia, Honduras and Indonesia accessed safe and dignified Best Interests Procedures (BIP).

What can we learn from the Blueprint?

The Blueprint's harmonized approach to programming shows the benefits of coordinated, streamlined ways of working where each organization capitalizes on its comparative advantage building on recommendations from the 2018 UNICEF evaluation of child protection systems, and the 2021 UNHCR child protection evaluation. UNHCR leads on BIP assessments, and UNICEF leads on community-based MHPSS services. UNHCR has long-standing expertise on asylum and refugee standards and child friendly procedures. UNICEF has a comparative advantage advocating for increased public financing for children (as part of national budget processes). By working in partnership, and strategic leveraging of these comparative advantages stakeholders are able to see a greater impact on child protection systems for refugee children, indeed for all children in a country.

What more can be done to further the Blueprint's goals?

There are many opportunities to support joint child protection initiatives. Donors, advocates, legislators, and others can work together to advocate for, finance, and implement the following types of activities:

- Multi-year joint programming in select countries that focuses on the inclusion of asylum-seeking and refugee children in national child protection systems and addresses issues of equity, diversity, gender, and assistance for the most vulnerable;

- Development and implementation of an international accreditation programme for para-professional training of community-based child protection officers (nationally accredited child protection training programme with standardized curricula, international accreditation, and mentoring to reinforce government-led and community-based child protection; strengthening the social service workforce in each country);
- Provide technical and financial support to assessing and strengthening inclusion of refugee children in national child protection system; and
- Increase investment in birth registration systems, including outreach and reform to address barriers for refugee children and other vulnerable children to birth registration.

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