



2021 - 2025



Addis Ababa
Ethiopia

UNHCR ETHIOPIA REFUGEE CHILD PROTECTION STRATEGY



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

Ethiopia

ABBREVIATIONS

FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GPI	Gender Parity Index
GRF	Global Refugee Forum
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
INVEA	Immigration, Nationality and Vital Events Agency
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoWCY	Ministry of Women, Children and Youth
NAP	National Action Plan
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OCP	Out-of-Camp Policy
PA	Participatory Assessment
PoC	Person of Concern
PPA	Project Partnership Agreement
PSEA	Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
PSS	Psychosocial Support
PTA	Parent-Teacher Association
RCC	Refugee Central Committee
RVERA	Regional Vital Events Registration Agency
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UASC	Unaccompanied and Separated Children
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
WASH	Water, Hygiene and Sanitation
WFP	World Food Programme
YFS	Youth Friendly Space

¹ Persons of Concern is ‘a person whose protection and assistance needs are of interest to UNHCR. This includes refugees, asylum-seekers, stateless people, internally displaced people and returnees.’ UNHCR Master Glossary. Available on: <https://reporting.unhcr.org/glossary/p>

INTRODUCTION

As of March 2021, the total number of refugee children in Ethiopia is 469,683, representing 58.33 percent of the total refugee population. Out of the total number of children, 41,670 are unaccompanied and separated children, while 66,712 children are registered as children with specific needs other than unaccompanied or separated. The total number of refugee youth is 199,009, representing 24.7 percent of the total refugees in Ethiopia.

Owing to their age, refugee children are at greater risks than adults of abuse, neglect, violence, exploitation, trafficking or forced recruitment into armed groups and face other child protection risks. The disruption of protection mechanisms such as family and community in displacement situations can have a significant effect on children. Girls in particular may face gender related protection risks, such as various forms of gender- based violence like rape and early marriage. While some may engage in negative coping mechanisms such as transactional sex. Refugee children in urban settings also face multi-faceted protection risks due to the high cost of living, limited access to relevant information and community support. On the other hand, children are highly resilient and find ways to maximize the existing coping mechanisms within family, friendship, learning, playing, and sports. Similarly, while refugee youth play significant roles in the protection and development of their communities, programming often overlooks youth interventions. Consequently, youth are often prone to different protection risks such as adverse coping mechanisms, onward movement/migration and associated protection risks, and involvement in criminal activities and alcohol or drug addiction due to limited meaningful engagement.

Children's rights are enshrined in international law, including in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and are at the heart of UNHCR's protection mandate. Due to the high proportion of refugee children in Ethiopia and the specific protection risks that they face in displacement settings, responding to the specific protection risks of children is a key priority for UNHCR in Ethiopia. Therefore, this national Child Protection Strategy (2021-2025) further reinforces UNHCR's commitment to the protection of children from abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence, and aims at contributing to a better future for children, their families and communities; all of which are in the best interests of children.

This strategy is developed based on the UNHCR Framework for the Protection of Children (2012), the 2021 UNHCR revised Best Interests Procedure Guidelines, the revised 2019 Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Actions (CPMS), the UNHCR- United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Blueprint Joint Plan of Action, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)-UNICEF Technical Guidance on Addressing Child Marriage in Humanitarian Settings (2021), the Global Compact on Refugees (2018), UNHCR's Need to Know Guidance on working with persons with Disabilities (2019) and other relevant documents. The strategy was developed following a stock-taking exercise of UNHCR Child Protection (CP) National Strategy (2017-2019), conducted in all field locations in January 2021. As this strategy is an overarching strategy for the Ethiopia refugee operation, UNHCR Sub-Offices shall develop a context specific workplans to guide context specific child protection issues and programmes.

The scope of this strategy is limited to refugee children and youth between 15-24 years. The geographical coverage includes all refugee locations in Ethiopia including out of camps where refugees live.

² Digital Partner Statistical Tool | L3 Protection Profile (unhcr-eth.org)

Principles and Approaches³

State Responsibility

States are primarily responsible for the protection of all children and should promote the establishment and implementation of child protection systems in accordance with their international obligations, ensuring access to all children under their jurisdiction. UNHCR seeks to strengthen these systems and advocate for non-discriminatory access for all children including refugee and asylum-seeking children. In contexts where the State is not able to fulfil this responsibility for children of concern, UNHCR coordinates with partners to provide services.

Family and Community-Based Approach

Families and communities are central to the care and protection that children need. UNHCR seeks to understand, support and build upon existing community mechanisms that protect girls and boys. In instances where protection concerns originate from the family or community, UNHCR will act as an advocate for children to address harmful practices.

Child Participation

UNHCR and its partners will actively support the rights of all children to participate and express their views in all matters affecting them in accordance with their gender, age, maturity level and capacity. Different participatory methodologies will be applied for different ages including for younger children and adolescents to ensure their meaningful participation. Effective participation recognizes children as rights-holders, supports the development of their capacities and resilience and enables them to better protect themselves and their peers.

Non-Discrimination

UNHCR and its partners will ensure non-discrimination in all policies, procedures and programmes and will support and advocate for the access of, asylum seekers and refugee children to national child protection systems regardless of their age, gender, ethnicity, religion, nationality or other diversity.

Best Interests of the Child

The best interests of the child are a primary consideration for UNHCR in all actions that directly or indirectly affect children. The best interest principle establishes that all children have the right to participate meaningfully in decisions that affect their lives, including in the assessment and determination of their best interests. UNHCR will continue to ensure necessary procedures for decisions regarding individual children at risk and their long-term care arrangements and solutions.

Do No Harm

UNHCR and partners will consider the child's family, culture and social situation and conduct actions, procedures and programmes in a manner that does not put the child at risk of harm. The participation of boys and girls in decisions that affect their lives will be planned and facilitated in a responsible and ethical manner with due regard to confidentiality.

Age, Gender and Diversity

UNHCR's Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD) approach ensures that all persons of concern, including boys and girls, children and adolescents, enjoy equal rights. It recognizes that children may be affected differently by protection risks as a result of their age, gender, disability and background. The AGD approach increases understanding, as to how protection risks can affect girls and boys and infants, school age children and adolescents differently and equips staff with the necessary tools to develop appropriate responses.

Partnership

The Strategy will be implemented in partnership with the GoE, communities, children, UNICEF and other child protection actors and agencies. Coordination of child protection interventions will be through the national and field protection working groups and child protection sub-working groups. This will involve active collaboration and coordination of activities, joint assessments, complementary programmes, advocacy and resource mobilization. It will draw upon the complementarity of resources, knowledge and skills to enhance the protection of children, recognizing the contribution of all actors in developing a comprehensive child protection system in Ethiopia.

³ UNHCR Child Protection Framework (2012). Available on: <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4fe875682.pdf>

Accountability

UNHCR and partners are ultimately accountable to the children and communities they work to protect. Participatory mechanisms, accessible to children and allowing them to provide feedback on UNHCR's and partners' services, are essential for accountability. UNHCR and partners will elicit feedback from children and their families and use this information to shape and improve interventions. UNHCR and partners will also ensure that complaints mechanisms are child friendly and children who submit complaints receive feedback in a timely manner.

VISION AND STRATEGIC GOALS

The vision of the refugee child protection sector is to realize the enjoyment of basic human rights by all children and youth. In its efforts to achieve this objective, the Child Protection sector strives to ensure that every child and youth are protected from violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation.

The UNHCR Ethiopia Child Protection Strategy aims at supporting the attainment of the following strategic priorities:

1. Inclusion of refugee children in the national child protection and birth registration systems.
2. Provision of targeted support for refugee children with specific needs in their best interests.
3. Strengthening of community-based child protection mechanisms and improvement in the meaningful participation of children.
4. Enhancement of the protection and empowerment of refugee youth (age 15-24).
5. Refugee children have access to protective education.
6. Mainstreaming of Gender Based Violence (GBV) prevention, risk mitigation and response in the child protection sector.

OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

The Ethiopia refugee operation consists of five Sub-Offices (Assosa, Gambella, Jijiga, Melkadida, and Shire) and a Representation office in Addis Ababa which includes an urban sub-unit. In total, the Ethiopia operation covers 27 refugee camps, and an urban programme in Addis Ababa.

Ethiopia is State party to various international and regional treaties, including but not limited to, the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, its 1967 Protocol and the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa. Ethiopia's Parliament repealed the previous Refugee Proclamation No. 409/2004 and adopted Refugee Proclamation No. 1110/2019 providing better rights and protection for refugees in Ethiopia. Moreover, Ethiopia is also party to several international treaties related to children. Some of the most relevant international treaties include, but are not limited to, the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Child (UNCRC); the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child; the ILO Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor; the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict among others.

The 2021 Participatory Assessment identified the main protection risks faced by children across the refugee operations in Ethiopia. These protection issues include rape, child labour, child marriage, an increase in negative coping mechanisms such as transactional sex among adolescent girls; chewing khat and alcohol abuse by the youth; an increase in criminal activities such as theft and robbery by children and youth; school drop outs mainly among adolescent girls, conflict between refugee and host community youth due to lack of opportunities for the youth; onward movement/migration and exposure to the associated protection risks and limited access to different services for children with disabilities.

⁴ Empowerment is 'a participatory process that increases the capacity of people or groups to take greater control over the decisions, assets, policies, processes and institutions that affect their lives.'
UNHCR Master Glossary. Available on: <https://www.unhcr.org/glossary/#e>

Moreover, limited awareness on the existing child protection risks including GBV risks among children and youth also increases their exposure to child protection risks. Furthermore, the outbreak of COVID-19 quickly changed the protection environment of refugee children and youth across the Ethiopia operation. Closure of schools, child and youth-friendly spaces, restrictions on freedom of movement, loss of income, livelihoods and remittances by parents and caregivers resulted in multi-faceted child protection risks and put children at heightened risks of abuse, neglect and exploitation. The assessment also revealed that the existing youth and children committees and networks help in prevention activities and are existing capacities within the refugee communities.

The existing information management systems such as the UNHCR proGres database, the Child Protection Information Management System (CPIMS), and child protection databases (Excel sheets) also recorded the above-mentioned protection incidents and facilitate case management services to children at risk, including unaccompanied and separated children.

The refugee Child protection coordination meetings are convened every month at the national, sub-office and camp levels together with the GBV coordination, which is referred to as the national CP/GBV Sub-Working Group. The forums are co-chaired by the Agency for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA) and UNHCR and provide a strategic direction for the CP and GBV programmes in Ethiopia. It is also a forum to share good practices, opportunities and challenges related to CP/GBV interventions. All GBV and Child Protection actors participate regularly in the CP/GBV Sub-Working Group coordination forum.

Despite the critical roles of having adequate human and financial resources for effective and efficient child protection work, the available human and financial resources for the refugee CP programme are minimal. In the refugee programme, UNHCR and partners rely heavily on the contribution of refugee incentive workers for child protection case management and other targeted interventions. While the contribution of refugee incentive workers in child protection work is significant, there is a critical capacity and national CP specific staffing gap, which requires structured capacity development and financial resources to effectively respond to child protection issues.

Currently, UNHCR and partners are engaged in different forms of awareness raising and advocacy interventions to ensure the protection of refugee children with the engagement of the refugee community. Also, UNHCR and UNICEF are engaged in different advocacy efforts related to birth registration and inclusion of refugee children in the national child protection system, which includes the national case management system.

On 20 January 2020, UNHCR and UNICEF committed to a model and transformative Blueprint partnership to secure refugee children a fair deal, in line with the Global Compact on Refugees, and as reflected in the commitments made at the Global Refugee Forum. Key objectives of this new partnership include strengthening existing national child protection systems, including birth registration systems, developing capacities of national partners on refugee protection and integrating refugee children in the national child protection systems and plans. Thus, development of the social service workforce, supporting the implementation of the best interests procedure, strengthening mainstreaming of GBV risk mitigation and response, and strengthening Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) are some of the core interventions envisioned under the Blueprint in 2021 and beyond. Moreover, as part of the existing partnership, UNHCR and UNICEF have signed a Letter of Understanding (LoU) covering the period from 1 September 2020 to 31 December 2023.

In September 2020, the signed Ethiopia's new UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF: 2020-2025) with results areas under People; Peace; Prosperity and Planet. UNHCR engaged actively in its formulation, which included refugees and other persons of concern (PoC) within its 'leave no one behind' commitments. UNHCR also contributed to the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) Result Group # 12.2, Equality and Empowerment- Youth. The GoE made specific pledges in the area of primary, secondary and tertiary education, as well as documentation. The education pledge covers increased enrolment in primary, secondary and tertiary education for all qualified refugee children and youth without discrimination and within the available resources, while the documentation pledge covers provision of benefits such as issuance of birth certificates to refugee children born in Ethiopia. Moreover, the GoE also made a specific pledge at the High-Level Segment on Statelessness held in Geneva in October 2019 "to (...) improve access to birth registration procedures, including late registration to ensure universal birth registration to refugee children". This is in line with the Government's responsibility and commitment to fulfil the fundamental right of children to birth registration (Art. 24(2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and Art. 7 of the UNCRC, both ratified by Ethiopia), and Article 36 of Refugee Proclamation No. 1110/2019 providing for refugees' equal treatment as Ethiopian nationals in terms of vital events registration. It will also assist the GoE to achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 16.9 on birth registration by providing legal identity for all, including free birth registration.

⁵ Participatory Assessment is a process of building partnerships with refugee women and men of all ages and backgrounds by promoting meaningful participation through structured dialogue. Participatory assessment includes holding separate discussions with women, girls, boys, and men, including adolescents, in order to gather accurate information on the specific protection risks they face and the underlying causes, to understand their capacities, and to hear their proposed solutions.

⁶ In the UNHCR Ethiopia operation, there are 158 (79 Gambella, 10 Melkadida, 4 Jijiga, 63 Assosa and 2 Addis Ababa) children's committees/structures supporting and facilitating children participation throughout the project cycle. This structures also helps in awareness raising interventions on child rights, child protection and other important topics affecting refugee children. For Tigray region, the community structures were disrupted but efforts are being made to reestablish them.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 2021 - 2025

1. Inclusion of refugee children in the national child protection and birth registration systems.

For UNHCR, “A child protection system includes functions undertaken by a range of formal and informal actors to prevent, mitigate and respond to the risks faced by children’. A child protection system is comprised of six multi-sector elements: Legal and Policy Framework; Knowledge and Data; Coordination; Human and Financial Capacities; Prevention and Response Activities and Advocacy and Awareness-Raising⁷.

In line with the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) approach, UNHCR and child protection partners promote the inclusion of refugee children in the national child protection and birth registration systems for a better child protection outcome. The revised UNHCR Best Interests Procedure Guidelines: Assessing and Determining the Best Interests of the Child (BIP Guidelines) was released in May 2021. Among other things, in line with ExCom Conclusion 107, the revised BIP Guidelines strengthen guidance on working with the national child protection systems, including the need to assess the appropriateness and accessibility of the national child protection procedures/systems for refugees. Criteria for what constitutes an ‘appropriate’ national child protection procedure, as defined by Member States in ExCom No. 107 and the UNCRC include:

- A procedure that facilitates adequate child participation without discrimination.
- Where the views of the child are given due weight while considering age and maturity.
- Decision-making is done with the involvement of persons with relevant expertise.
- All relevant factors are balanced in order to assess the best option and a procedure, the best interest principle is applied in a manner that seeks to ensure the full and effective enjoyment of all the rights recognized in the CRC.
- The capacity of the system or procedure to handle individual cases of children in a timely manner is highlighted as a practical consideration for refugee children’s inclusion in the national system.

Achievements	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Continuous advocacy by UNICEF and UNHCR led to the inclusion of refugees and other persons of concerns in the national case management framework developed by Ministry of Women, Children and Youth (MoWCY) in 2019. → Continuous advocacy by UNHCR and UNICEF led to the amendment of the Vital Events Registration Directive for Federal Vital Event Registration Offices, Directive No. 6. → Since the launch of the vital events registration in October 2017, ARRA registered a total of 16,228 birth across the refugee camps, Addis Ababa and ARRA zonal offices. → Continuous advocacy has been undertaken by UNHCR and UNICEF to ensure the inclusion of refugees in the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) Comprehensive Assessment, which is led by the Immigration, Nationality and Vital Events Agency (INVEA), and the outcome of this advocacy has positively led to the inclusion of refugees in the assessment and eventually in the national CRVS costed strategy. → Launch of CPIMS+ for refugee and host community children in Gambella, which affects 45% of all refugee children in Ethiopia, and will also demonstrate the interoperability of ProGres, CPIMS+ and the National Case Management Framework for child protection case management. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Absence of formal collaboration with the government mandated child protection ministry- Ministry of Women, Children and Youth (MoWCY). → Inadequate capacity of the national child protection system: UNHCR and stakeholders such as UNICEF promote the inclusion of all refugee children in the national child protection system. However, currently the system may not be adequate to effectively identify and respond to the specific protection needs of refugee children. This capacity covers human and financial resources, as well as availability of the required expertise within the national child protection system. → Limited access to birth registration: Despite ARRA’s achievements following the launching of birth registration in October 2017 for 16,228 children, the backlog of birth registration is more than 140,000 children, which requires a comprehensive strategy and resource mobilization currently unavailable. Moreover, the legal requirement and practice of the presence of both parents for birth registration of a child and low awareness of the refugee community about the benefits of birth registration limits the overall outcome of birth registration by ARRA. → Low incentive payment resulting for high turnover of skilled refugee incentive workers and affecting the overall CP programme.

Priority outcomes/results:

Coordination and collaboration with national child protection systems are enhanced with the long-term objective of increased access of refugee children to national child protection systems, including birth registration.

To achieve this strategic priority, the operation will

- * Strengthen the existing national child protection system and plans and establish an internal roadmap for the appropriate inclusion of refugee children into the national child protection system
- * Strategically engage with the MoWCY and other relevant government stakeholders for the meaningful inclusion of refugee children in the national child protection system. This includes provision of support to the GoE in the implementation of the National Case Management Framework.
- * Strategically engage with INVEA, RVERA, ARRA and other relevant government counterparts to facilitate refugee children's access to birth registration and address barriers to access to birth registration.
- * Support the GoE to implement the national CRVS costed strategy which is expected to address barriers to access birth registration.
- * Strengthen partnerships and coordination with implementing and operation partners and donors working on refugees' access to legal documentation, including legal identity documents issued for children by government counterparts.
- * Strengthening partnership and collaboration with development actors with the overall objectives of strengthening the capacity of the national CP and birth registration system for effective inclusion of refugee children.
- * Advocate for better incentive payment which take the skills and workload into consideration.
- * Strengthen resource mobilization (both financial and human resources) jointly with UNICEF aiming at facilitating the inclusion of refugees in the national child protection system, including birth registration.

2. Provision of targeted support for children with specific needs in their best interests

As part of the child protection programme, UNHCR and partners continue to implement the Best Interests Procedure (BIP) and Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) for refugee children with specific needs. The implementation of the BIP is guided by the revised UNHCR Guidelines on Assessing and Determining the Best Interests of the Child (BIP Guidelines), while the MHPSS component is guided by the 2019 revised Minimum Standard for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (CPMS). In this regard, safe and ethical collection, storage, sharing and analysis of information on children is crucial to enhance the response for individual children, as well as child protection programming more broadly. UNHCR has completed the rolled out proGres v4 child protection module across the Ethiopia refugee locations. UNHCR will work with all child protection partners to enhance the effective use of proGres v4 module for child protection case management. Currently, there are several challenges for the implementation of an effective child protection information management system in all refugee locations in Ethiopia. In order to make informed choices and design sustainable and successful implementation of a child protection information management system in Ethiopia, UNHCR together with partners will ensure the undertaking of joint assessments, planning, implementation, continuous maintenance of the existing Child protection information management system by a technical team and monitor the implementation of existing information management system.

⁷ UNHCR, 'A Framework for the protection of Children', 2012, p 15

⁸ UNHCR Guidelines on Assessing and Determining the Best Interests of the Child (BIP Guidelines). Available on: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5c18d7254.html>

⁹ UNHCR Guidelines on Assessing and Determining the Best Interests of the Child (BIP Guidelines). Available on: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5c18d7254.html>

Achievements	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → In 2020, a total of 50,345 children accessed different play, recreational and development interventions in the CFSs in the refugee camps of Gambella, Assosa, Melkadida, Jijiga, as well as Addis Ababa. → In 2020, 11,807 refugee children at risk including UASC accessed best interest procedures across the Ethiopia refugee operation. This increased the percentage of children accessing best interest procedures to 60.19 percent in 2020 compared to 2019. → UNHCR Ethiopia completed the migration of refugee data to proGres v4 in January 2021. → Despite the existing challenges, the current child protection information management system-The Legacy version of CPIMS supports child protection case management. → Alignment of refugee incentive worker job descriptions with government job descriptions for social service workforce, and linked to initiatives of standardized pre- and in-service training through TVETs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Human resources continue to be the main challenge in the implementation of BIP. The Ethiopia operation continues relying on refugee incentive case workers with limited technical capacity resulting in poor quality of case work and gaps in timely identification and response. → The high and frequent turnover of partners' national staff as well as the refugee incentive workers increase the challenge to implement quality and timely interventions. → Despite the considerable number of children accessing CFS, the existing CFS are limited in number and not adequately equipped with play, recreational and development activities. → There is a critical gap in the implementation of a holistic MHPSS in line with the minimum standard for child protection in humanitarian action. → Less focus on other children at risk (e.g., children with disabilities), there is lack of capacity within UNHCR and partners to provide effective responses to the protection needs of children with disabilities and other special needs. → Shortage of child protection dedicated staffing within UNHCR to undertake Best interests Determinations (BIDs) for children. → Lack of interoperability between different child protection information management systems (Primero vs proGres). → General cultural constraints and passive traditional attitude toward persons/children with disabilities, girls' participation and children's rights, including child marriage as a violation of those rights.

Priority outcomes/results:

Children with specific needs, including survivors of GBV, children with disabilities, UASC, children exposed to/at risk of child labour, child marriage and neglect, benefit from high quality case management services and MHPSS.

To achieve this strategic priority, the operation will

- * Enhance the implementation of comprehensive BIP covering identification, BIA/BID, case planning, implementation of the case plan, follow-up and review and case closure in line with the revised UNHCR Best Interests Procedure Guidelines and the national case management framework.
- * Update BIP Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), and specific needs criteria to ensure children at risk including UASC are fully covered in the case management and child protection response.
- * Strengthen the capacity of Para social workers/refugee social workers through structured capacity development interventions, mentoring and supportive supervision to enhance their technical child protection capacity in collaboration with UNICEF and other stakeholders.
- * Strengthening of the capacity of child protection workforces of UNHCR, the government, Implementing and operational partners in child protection in general and case management in particular.

- * Respond to the MHPSS needs of refugee children through the implementation of holistic MHPSS intervention at all levels such as respectful basic services and security; community and family strengthening support; focused non-specialized support and specialized service.
- * Enhance visibility and fundraising to ensure the availability of adequate financial and human resources for the child protection programme.
- * Strengthen the protection of children with disabilities through better cross-sectoral coordination and multi-sectoral interventions.
- * Strengthen the existing child protection and GBV programmes (case management, community engagement, safe spaces among others) to address the gender and social norms underpinning harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM) as well as protection from harmful practices.
- * Mainstream child protection in other sectors such as GBV, education, health and nutrition, livelihood, WASH, shelter and other sectors for better identification, prevention and response to all children at risk. This includes capacity development interventions of other sectors on child protection and strengthening referral linkages.
- * Support the roll-out of the child protection module of proGres v4 in the refugee context. The roll-out of the proGres v4 child protection module will facilitate safe and ethical data collection, storage, sharing and analysis both for individual child protection case management and child protection programming in general.
- * In situations, where other child protection information management systems are used, ensure the interoperability and harmonization of data of the existing child protection information management systems with the UNHCR proGres v4 child protection module .
- * Support and facilitate durable solutions for unaccompanied children in their best interests.



South Sudanese refugee children receiving nutrition products through the blanket supplementary feeding programmes in Gambella.

Photo: © UNHCR

¹⁰ United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF): ‘Addressing Child Marriage in Humanitarian Settings, Technical Guide for staff and partners of the UNHCP-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage’, February 2021

¹¹ CPMS+ has been rolled out in Sub-Office Gambella. Roll-out of CPMS+ in other refugee contexts will be guided by the UNHCR-UNICEF agreed standards and takes all the necessary steps such as joint assessments, planning, implementation, continuous maintenance and monitoring.

¹² Child Protection Issue Brief: Community-based child protection mechanisms, September 2013, Child Protection Unit, Division of International Protection. Available on: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/531ec54f4.html>

3. Strengthening of community-based child protection mechanisms and improvement in the meaningful participation of children

In times of humanitarian crises and forced displacement, the capacity of parents, caregivers and communities is often undermined due to multi-faceted child protection issues such as abuse, neglect, exploitation, GBV, family separation and recruitment into armed forces and groups among others. Forced displacement often exacerbated existing child protection risks. In order to mitigate those risks, it is important that humanitarian actors support and strengthen the protective capacity of families and communities. The active involvement of communities in the protection of children is a key principle of action for UNHCR and is reiterated in the Framework for the Protection of Children . Across the refugee operation in Ethiopia, there are several child protection community-based mechanisms such as child protection committees, child parliaments, child welfare committees and others. Therefore, this Strategy aims at strengthening the child protection community-based mechanisms in order to ensure effective protection of children and facilitate meaningful participation of children in decisions affecting their lives. Furthermore, the strategy aims at strengthening the linkage between the community-based child protection mechanisms with the host community structures such as Community Care

Achievements	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → In total, 158 (79 Gambella, 10 Melkadida, 4 Jijiga, 63 Assosa and 2 Addis Ababa) children's committees/ groups or other community- based structures are operational. → The existing CP committees plan and implement different child protection prevention interventions together with child protection actors. → Child parliament and GBV clubs supported GBV prevention intervention in schools in Jijiga refugee operation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Challenges remain with the meaningful participation of children. Though children committees and clubs are active in different locations, the existing structures require further capacity development to ensure more interactive participation of children. → Limited understanding of the purpose and goal of child protection community-based mechanisms by children, the refugee communities and humanitarian actors. → Limited linkages between the various existing committees and clubs. → High rotation and turnover of the committees' members which is affecting the implementation of activities and the commitment of key community persons.

Priority outcomes/results:

Children, parents and caregivers benefit from interventions, which effectively develop their skills, capacities and contribute to their empowerment, protection and decision making.

To achieve this strategic priority, the operation will

- * Strengthen **community-based forums for children** (e.g. child led-clubs, child parliaments) to empower children and youth and to engage them in community mobilization from the first stages of life through capacity development interventions such as training, mentoring, coaching and supervision. This intervention requires due consideration of Age, Gender and Diversity in order to ensure all children are meaningfully participated in all decisions affecting their lives.

- * **Empower community-based structures to manage their own programmes** as protection partners/stakeholders with budgets and resources, including the Refugee Central Committee (RCC), Child Protection Committees and most importantly Youth and Children's groups.
- * Ensure and strengthen linkages amongst community-based forums for children, other community-based structures (e.g. leaders) and service providers at all levels and the host community structures such as CCCs.
- * Encourage and receive child friendly feedback / Establish complaint mechanisms e.g., through satisfaction surveys or feedback discussions, participatory assessment, structurally included in the programme cycle. Child Friendly PSEA Complaint and Feedback Mechanisms shall also be supported to ensure children report on the incidents of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.
- * Incorporate life skills and leadership training/initiatives for youth between the age of 15-24 in child protection programming, including Peacebuilding and social cohesion, highlighting the age-gender-diversity approach and gender equality.

4. Enhancement of the protection and empowerment of refugee youth (age 15-24)

The 2021 PA identified key protection issues affecting refugee youth such as increasing of negative coping mechanisms such as transactional sex among adolescent girls; chewing Khat and alcohol abuse by boys and youth; increasing of criminal activities such as theft and robbery by children and youth; school drop outs mainly among adolescent girls, conflict between refugee and host

communities youth due to lack of opportunities for the youth; onward migration and exposure to the associated protection risks. The 2021 PA also showed that the lack of livelihoods and income generating activities in the camps was allegedly reported to have contributed to the increase of negative coping mechanisms and criminality including theft, and robbery especially by idle youths.

The actions related to refugee youth is guided by the 'Core Action for Refugee Youth' The 2021 PA showed that the lack of livelihoods and income generating activities in the camps was allegedly reported to have contributed to the increase of adverse coping mechanisms and criminality, including theft, and robbery especially by idle youth. Moreover, COVID-19 affected the engagement of children/youth in CFS/YFS centres, due to the closure of the places or the downsizing of the activities. Lack of engagement of youth in activities and limited support to youth association was also under-scored.



Refugee children welcoming Italian President H.E Sergio Mattarella during his visit to Gambella on 16 March 2016 in Tierkidi Refugee Camp.

Photo: © UNHCR

Achievements	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Youth Associations, as community-based mechanisms have been established to support the meaningful participation and contribution of youth throughout the project cycles. The existing Youth Associations support in the identification of protection risks in the refugee community, contribute in planning of interventions together with humanitarian actors, support the implementation of interventions and monitor humanitarian projects. → In the Gambella region, the Youth Peace Education Club has been supported in addressing key protection issues of young people, which contributes to fostering peaceful co-existence between refugee and host communities through art among other activities. → Refugee youth have been accessing different recreational and sports activities in the existing Youth Friendly Spaces (YFS) contributing to the physical, mental and emotional wellbeing of youth. → Many youths actively contribute to the protection of their community through community mobilization and serving as CFS facilitators and incentive workers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Limited interventions and targeted programs availed for youth due to limited financial resources. → Adverse coping mechanisms by youth such as transactional sex, engagement in criminal activities and substance abuse including khat and alcohol. → Onward movement/migration and exposure to protection risks such as trafficking and human smuggling, extortion of ransom, torture, physical exploitation and abuse and death among others. → Cultural constrains and traditions related to youth engagement in activities. Most of girls/young women are forced to marry or support her family at home. While boys/young men are obliged to leave schools and support family income. Child protection and GBV partners are working on intervention to transforming social norms within the refugee community. → Lack of social spaces and facilities where youth can access some structured entertainments. Youth cannot have access to internet, libraries, social and mindful games as well as prepared outdoor spaces for sport and art.

Priority outcomes/results:

Refugee youth are empowered through youth focused opportunities and have meaningfully contributed for the protection of their communities and themselves.

To achieve this strategic priority, the operation will

- * Empower refugee youth through meaningful engagement by facilitating opportunities for youth to voice their ideas and concerns, engage in decision making processes, and develop their leadership potential.
- * Advocate for additional fund to particularly support youth programs and innovative projects.
- * Recognize, utilize, and develop refugee youth capacities and skills through facilitation of learning opportunities, including formal, non-formal education, skills development, and jobs training.
- * Facilitate employment and livelihood opportunities in coordination with the relevant sectors.
- * Support access of refugee youth to multi-sectoral services to support their mental, emotional, and physical health needs.
- * Collect, analyze and produce quality disaggregated data on the protection needs of youth, priorities, capacities for planning designing, programming, advocacy and fund-raising purposes.

5. Girls and boys have access to protective education

There are many natural links between child protection and education. A lack of access to education has direct negative impact on children’s well-being and development. Children, who are out of school, can face greater child protection risks. Child protection concerns can prevent children from accessing education or can decrease educational outcomes. Strengthened collaboration between child protection and education actors can increase children’s resilience; Support psychosocial, cognitive and physical development; Mitigate protection risks; Support positive peer relationships and social cohesion; and Promote essential life skills that support children’s capacities and confidence.

As of 2019/2020, 45.11% of school-age children covering pre-primary, primary and secondary are out of schools and these children are at different child protection risks. The 2021 PA revealed school dropouts were a major concern reported by groups of children, youth and adults. The PA highlighted the main reasons for school dropouts as early marriage, pregnancies, lack of school uniforms and school feeding programmes, far distances to and from schools, lack of sanitary pads for girls and lack of solar lights for study.

UNHCR Ethiopia has developed a 2020 – 2025 National Education Strategy. The strategy has three objectives: Promote equitable and sustainable inclusion for refugees and other people of concern in national education systems; foster safe enabling environments that support learning for all students, regardless of legal status, gender or disability and enable all learners to use their education toward sustainable futures. Moreover, the strategy clearly highlights the strong linkage between the child protection and the education sector for better protection and education outcomes for children and youth. Therefore, the refugee national CP strategy (2021-2025) aimed at enhancing linkage between child protection and education sectors for better protection outcomes for children.

Achievements	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Gender clubs established in schools and training on GBV for club members provided → Tutorial class¹ arranged and provided for female students → Child Protection Complaint and Feedback Mechanisms have been established in schools. However, the use of the mechanisms is still low → Mainstreaming of child protection in education at all education levels (Gambella). The mainstreaming is an ongoing process through training teachers and school management on CP issues, supporting schools’ clubs focusing on children rights, engaging CP community structures and Parent Teachers Associations (PTAs) in joint activities. Moreover, implementing “learning through play” methodology and enhance safe learning environment in schools as well as at home. → In coordination with UNICEF, friendly children rights posters are distributed in all schools in camps, in addition to service centers. (Gambella) → Child protection/GBV and education sub-working groups are periodically meeting and sharing information and plans to enhance joint and harmonized interventions. (Gambella) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → High school drop-out particularly girls due to child marriage. Participation of girls in education drastically drops between the first cycle (grades 1-4) and the second cycle grades 5-8) of primary school. The rate further reduces, when it comes to the transition from primary to secondary level for both girls and boys. → Limited access to education for children with disabilities, including children with hearing and visual impairments, due to limited funding. → The linkage between education and child protection needs to be strengthened for better education and child protection outcomes. → The Gender Parity Index (GPI) at primary level stands at 0.64. The Gender Parity Index (GPI) means that for every ten boys enrolled in a school, there are only six girls. → Lack of basic elements to ensure students retention in education such as girls/young mothers’ rooms, distribution of adequate hygiene and sanitary kits. Moreover, school feeding to support students’ wellbeing when learning is very limited to one type of food and even underfunded. Referral mechanisms of children at risk in schools are still limited and inefficient due to weak linkage and coordination between CP and education sectors.

¹⁴ Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2019. Available on: https://alliancecpha.org/en/CPMS_home

¹⁵ Tutorial class is a session of intensive tuition given by a tutor to an individual or to a small number of students with the objective of helping or coaching students in their learning.

Priority outcomes/results:

Linkage between Child Protection and Education strengthened to enhance the protection of children from abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence and ensure refugee children are safe in the learning environment.

To achieve this strategic priority, the operation will

- * Conduct assessments to identify, support and strengthen referral systems for children with special education needs and expand accelerated learning and catch-up programs in close collaboration with education partners to trace out-of-school children with clear linkages to formal education.
- * Ensure the mainstreaming of child protection in the education sector through development of joint action plans.
- * Develop/strengthen multisectoral referral pathways and train education workers how to safely refer children with protection needs.
- * Ensure education and child protection staff/actors have signed and been trained on safeguarding procedures and policies that prohibit corporal (physical) punishment and other degrading forms of punishment. Also, train teachers and school management on the Code of Conduct including on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) on an annual basis.
- * Promote joint education and child protection assessments and analysis that focus on all children's access to education, barriers to access education, AGD considerations in the education sector and issues that impact school retention among others.
- * Raise children's and community members' awareness of how to identify and report barriers to access education and child protection risks in and around educational facilities.
- * Establish joint coordination groups of CP, GBV and Education that regularly review the progress of the strategic plan, including any policy and advocacy work. Jointly monitor and review the use of referral pathways; compliance with codes of conduct (such as incidences of corporal punishment and PSEA); and the child protection situation in and around educational facilities.
- * Improve the learning and playing spaces in schools and the communal spaces, to support the inclusion of all children particularly those with special needs and disabilities.
- * Advocate for more funding particularly supporting the mainstreaming of child protection and GBV into education and other relevant sectors such as health, nutrition, and WASH.

6. Mainstreaming GBV risk mitigation in the child protection sector

Following the development of a National Action Plan (NAP) on GBV prevention, risk mitigation and response mainstreaming in December 2018, UNHCR continued the implementation of the NAP in the child protection sector. Accordingly, as of June 2020, 3492 female representatives from community-based structures participated in discussions and capacity development sessions on GBV risks affecting unaccompanied and separated children across the Ethiopia operation. Furthermore, as part of the mainstreaming efforts, UNHCR continued to incorporate GBV-related questions in child protection assessments conducted by UNHCR and child protection partners.

Achievements	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Operations ensured the incorporation of the NAP indicator in the child protection partners' PPAs and followed up on the implementation. → By mid-2020, 1768 female representatives from community-based structures participated in discussions and capacity development sessions on GBV risks affecting unaccompanied and separated children. → A regular GBV awareness raising activity inside the CFS across the camps have been done in collaboration with the GBV partners. → Training on NAP has been undertaken for child protection partner staff and refugee incentive workers. → GBV-related specific questions incorporated in child protection assessments in Field and Sub-Offices and findings from these assessments were disseminated, which informed the development of action plans. → Regular Child Protection and GBV working groups meetings to share information, challenges and discussion join actions and plans of response. → Improvement observed in the referral of GBV children cases among CP and GBV partners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Limited monitoring on the implementation of the GBV risk mitigation in the child protection sector. → Lack of holistic GBV mainstreaming in the child protection sector as mainstreaming effort focus is usually on the implementation stage rather than throughout the project cycle → Limited understanding of the NAP among UNHCR and partner staff → Trainings deprioritized/cancelled due to COVID-19. → Difficulty to obtain age disaggregated data on GBV risk mitigation interventions. → Lack of friendly materials and communication techniques to support the awareness on GBV issues for young children.

Priority outcomes/results:

GBV prevention, risk mitigation and response mainstreaming interventions have been integrated in the child protection sector to ensure effective protection of children from GBV.

To achieve this strategic priority, the operation will

- * Incorporate GBV messages into child protection community outreach and awareness raising activities. Messages may include information on child survivors' rights, where to report risks and incident and how to access GBV response services.
- * Collaborate and coordinate with GBV coordination groups and actors to define and include the roles and responsibilities for preventing and responding to child survivors in Standard Operating Procedures.
- * Collect and analyze information about existing GBV risks through secondary data review.
- * Develop/strengthen a referral pathway by mapping types and capacity of existing formal and informal service providers; provide child-friendly survivor-centred services; and possible entry points, where child survivors may seek support in the future.
- * Strengthen resource mobilization for an effective mainstreaming of GBV in the CP sector.
- * Incorporate GBV related questioners in the child protection assessments
- * Involve women, adolescent girls and other at-risk groups in relevant aspects of child protection programming (assessment, adequate representation in leadership structures and community-based CP mechanisms, child protection staffing, outreach activities, training, etc).
- * Support the capacity of community-based child protection networks and child protection actors to prevent and mitigate GBV through training, coaching, mentoring etc.
- * Support the provision of age-, gender-, and culturally sensitive multi-sectoral care and support for child survivors of GBV.
- * Where there are gaps in services for children and adolescents, support the training of medical, mental health and psychosocial, police, and legal/justice actors in how to engage with child survivors.
- * Monitor and address the risks of GBV for separated and unaccompanied girls and boys.
- * Ensure that child protection programmes sharing information about reports of GBV within the child protection sector or with partners in the larger humanitarian community abide by safety and ethical standards.

UNHCR ETHIOPIA REFUGEE CHILD PROTECTION STRATEGY

2021 - 2025



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