CONCORDIA Child Safeguarding in Emergencies

Addendum to the CONCORDIA Child Safeguarding Policy, October 2023

0. Introduction

CONCORDIA Social Projects' primary mission is to improve the lives of vulnerable and marginalised people and communities in Austria, Bulgaria, Romania, the Republic of Moldova and Kosovo. While having a broad mandate, CONCORDIA's humanitarian assistance efforts align with its mission by targeting populations in crises, particularly children who are at risk or have been affected by emergencies.

> **Child protection** in emergencies refers to the measures, policies, and actions taken in times of humanitarian crisis or emergencies (natural or man-made disasters, conflicts, pandemics, or other crises) and can include both short and long-term protection for children who are growing up in disrupted communities and among heightened risk.

Since 2016, CONCORDIA has implemented programmes in emergency settings or for children affected by emergencies: In 2016, the rising number of refugees from Syria, Afghanistan and similar countries led to the first projects for children on the move and their families as well as unaccompanied minors in Austria and Bulgaria.

In 2020, when the global COVID-19 pandemic hit, programmes and projects had to be restricted and adapted to adhere to national guidelines while at the same time ensuring that children's rights and safety are respected.

The beginning of the war in Ukraine on February 24th, 2022 challenged the organisation as a whole, as CONCORDIA has not had to respond to fleeing children and families at that scale before. CONCORDIA decided to set up projects providing shelter, food, psychosocial support and educational offers and has since then been supporting people fleeing the war in Austria, Bulgaria, Romania and, to the largest extent, the Republic of Moldova. In this brief addendum to the CONCORDIA Child Safeguarding Policy, the CONCORDIA

> **Child safeguarding** measures can be provided in a variety of locations from the direct centre of the crisis to (internally) displaced people and refugee facilities. The goal of child protection in emergencies is always to minimize the negative impacts of emergencies on children and ensure that their safety, well-being, and development are prioritized throughout the crisis and recovery phases.

Code of Conduct, and the CONCORDIA Visual Storytelling Guideline, the focus is therefore lying on child safeguarding measures in emergencies.

CONCORDIA's work is meant to protect all children's rights as stipulated in the UNCRC, as well as in the national legislation regarding promoting and respecting children's rights in the countries in which services are offered. In all actions with and for children, CONCORDIA is committed to safeguarding children and reporting and responding to any alleged abuse, taking

all the measures as stipulated in the internal national policies and procedures, no matter the source of the referral and the alleged perpetrator. The "Do No Harm" principle is a central tenet of the philosophy of the organisation.

Emergency Relief

CONCORDIA responds swiftly to natural disasters, conflicts, and other emergencies by providing immediate relief to affected populations. This includes distributing food, clean water, shelter, and hygienic and medical supplies to ensure the basic needs of children and families are met during these critical times.

Child Protection

Recognising the specific vulnerabilities of children in crises, CONCORDIA strongly emphasises child protection in humanitarian assistance efforts. CONCORDIA works to establish safe spaces, support child-friendly activities, and reunite separated families to ensure the well-being and safety of children affected by emergencies.

Education

CONCORDIA believes that education is a fundamental right for all children, especially in crises where it can give much-needed structure and perspective. CONCORDIA works to establish temporary learning spaces, facilitates online education, and collaborates with local schools as well as remedial education to provide access to educational resources, ensuring that children affected by emergencies can continue their learning and development.

Healthcare Support

In collaboration with local healthcare providers and international partners, CONCORDIA offers medical assistance and basic health services to communities in crisis. This includes referral to specialized services, mobile teams, and psychosocial support for traumatised children.

Livelihood Support

CONCORDIA recognizes the importance of helping communities regain their self-sufficiency. CONCORDIA implements livelihood programmes to assist families in rebuilding their lives, which ultimately contributes to children's long-term stability and well-being.

Collaboration and Partnerships

CONCORDIA collaborates with various international organisations, governmental agencies, and local NGOs to maximize the impact of its humanitarian aid efforts. By leveraging its network and expertise, CONCORDIA ensures that aid reaches those who need it most efficiently.

Monitoring and Evaluation

CONCORDIA places a strong emphasis on monitoring and evaluating its humanitarian aid programmes. CONCORDIA continuously assess the impact of their initiatives, gathers feedback from beneficiaries, and adapts its strategies to address evolving needs in crisis-affected areas.

1. The impact of emergencies on child well-being and safety

Displaced children on the move and children in other emergencies are children first and foremost. Children are entitled to full protection.

All actions related to displaced children must be guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and its four guiding principles. Children are among the most vulnerable populations during emergencies and forced displacement. Children are often physically and emotionally fragile, and their dependence on adults for care and protection can make them easy targets for sexual abuse and exploitation, abuse and neglect, forced labour, trafficking, early/forced marriage, illegal/illicit adoption, recruitment by criminal and armed groups (including terrorist groups) and deprivation of liberty. Children may go missing or end up living on the street and are often denied access to basic services.

The most common protection risks and vulnerabilities

Dangers and injuries

In emergency and conflict settings children are at greater risk of injury, disability or death caused by natural disasters or war. If injuries to children are not treated quickly and appropriately for their age, there is a greater chance of long-term or permanent injury or disability.

Physical violence and other harmful practices

Children in emergencies are highly vulnerable to physical violence and harmful practices such as corporal punishment, killing, maiming, torture, abduction and illegal/illicit adoption, child labour, and recruitment into armed groups. Displacement, breakdown of social structures, and increased stress levels among caregivers can lead to a higher likelihood of children experiencing physical abuse as their usual sources of protection are weakened or disrupted. Furthermore, limited access to education and protection services exacerbates their vulnerability, making it crucial for humanitarian organisations to prioritize child protection measures and ensure a safe environment for children affected by emergencies. Unaccompanied and separated children are at a heightened risk because of their isolated status and need special care systems in place.

Sexual violence and early/forced marriages

In emergency contexts, children face a heightened risk of sexual violence and early or forced marriages. Displacement and lack of security often expose them to sexual exploitation and abuse, including trafficking. Additionally, families under duress may resort to marrying off their children at a young age, driven by economic hardship or perceived protection from harm. To address these vulnerabilities, humanitarian efforts must focus on strengthening prevention, response, and support systems that protect children from sexual violence and harmful marriages, ensuring their safety, dignity, and access to essential services.

Mental health and psycho-social stress

Children in emergency and conflict settings often experience severe trauma. This can trigger psychosocial stress and mental health problems that can last into adulthood while limiting their social and emotional development as well as their health and educational potential. The lack of adequate and specialized institutions that offer services and opportunities for such children can lead to hopelessness and exacerbate their mental health issues while impeding their healthy development.

Children and the justice system

Emergencies often increase the possibility of children encountering the justice system as alleged offenders, victims or witnesses, or in a combination of these roles.

Child labour

In emergency contexts, children become particularly vulnerable to child labour and trafficking. Child labour is a prevalent protection risk and vulnerability in emergencies, as children often become the unintended victims of economic hardships and displacement. In crises, families may resort to sending their children to work to meet basic needs, exposing them to hazardous and exploitative conditions. The absence of education, weakened legal frameworks and limited access to social services further exacerbate the risk. Humanitarian organisations need to prioritize child protection, advocate against child labour, and provide alternative support mechanisms, including access to education and livelihood opportunities, to prevent and mitigate the impact of child labour during emergencies.

Inadequate registration and best interest assessments

During emergencies, many children are at risk due to inadequate registration processes and best-interest assessments. Without proper identification, children may be separated from their families, rendering them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Comprehensive registration and individualised best-interest assessments are essential to ensure that children's specific needs, vulnerabilities, and family connections are considered when making protection and care decisions.

Being left out of decision-making and missing a voice

Children often face protection risks in emergencies when they are excluded from decision-making processes. Their perspectives and needs may be overlooked, leaving them without a voice in matters affecting their well-being. Empowering children to participate in decision-making, advocating for their rights, and creating child-friendly spaces for expression are vital steps to address this vulnerability.

Being placed in detention due to their migratory status

Children on the move, including refugees and displaced persons, are at risk of being placed in detention due to their migratory status, which can have severe physical and psychological consequences. Detention facilities may lack adequate child protection measures, making children susceptible to abuse and neglect. Alternative, non-custodial measures should be explored to ensure the safety and well-being of these children in emergencies.

Lack of access to education

In emergencies, children often experience disruptions to their education, exposing them to various protection risks. This lack of access to education not only impacts their development but also increases their vulnerability to exploitation, early marriage, and recruitment into armed groups. Ensuring continued access to quality education for children in crises is crucial for their protection and prospects.

Lack of access to healthcare

Children's health is frequently compromised in emergencies due to limited access to healthcare services. This vulnerability is exacerbated when healthcare facilities are damaged or unavailable, increasing the risk of preventable illnesses and injuries. Robust healthcare systems and outreach programs must be in place to address children's healthcare needs in emergencies effectively.

Inadequate data, in particular, gendered analysis and response

Inadequate data collection and analysis, especially the lack of gender-sensitive information or information on disabilities, hinder effective child protection responses in emergencies. Without a clear understanding of the specific vulnerabilities faced by girls, boys and children with disabilities, it becomes challenging to design targeted interventions. Collecting and analysing gender-disaggregated data is essential to inform policies and programs that adequately address the unique needs of children during crises.

2. Child protection in emergencies: Key aspects and key interventions

	Key aspects	Key interventions	Key safeguarding measures in CONCORDIA
Prevention and Preparedness	This involves developing strategies and plans to mitigate risks to children before an emergency occurs.	It includes raising awareness, providing education on child protection, and establishing systems to respond effectively.	• Ongoing training and capacity strengthening for staff (e.g., trauma-informed practice and care) • Workshop in CP essential for onboarding of new staff • Further development of case management system • Awareness raising to mixing two different groups of potentially traumatised children from current and emergency programmes • Annual CP report, regular audits and continuous evaluation and monitoring of CP efforts
Immediate Response	When an emergency strikes, rapid and coordinated responses are crucial.	This may involve setting up *safe spaces or child-friendly spaces*, providing emergency shelter, distributing essential supplies (like food, water, and hygiene items), and conducting assessments to identify vulnerable children.	• Child-friendly spaces in all residential services • Distribution of essential supplies (food, hygiene kits, firewood, cash) • Immediate assessment of vulnerable children • Immediate assessment of vulnerable families
Family Reunification and Separated Children	Efforts are made to reunite children who have been separated from their families during emergencies.	Temporary care arrangements may be made for unaccompanied minors, ensuring their safety and well-being until family members can be located or a permanent solution can be found.	• Direct contact with national child protection authorities, independent of the nationality of the child

			• Establish an information mechanism for residents and support the contact to family members.
Psychosocial Support	Children often experience emotional distress during emergencies.	Psychosocial support programmes provide counselling, recreational activities, and a safe environment to help children cope with trauma and build resilience.	• Emergency psychological support upon arrival • Daily recreational activities • Psychological counselling • Capacity strengthening for staff, supervision offers
Education	Ensuring continued access to quality education is essential.	Temporary learning spaces, school kits, and trained educators help maintain a sense of normalcy for children and provide them with a safe place to learn and interact.	• Temporary learning spaces • Design of programmes and/or activities that facilitate the integration and participation of children with disability • Support for online learning, provision of equipment • Support to enrol children in local schools • Language courses for children • Cooperation with local schools and education authorities
Child Trafficking and Exploitation	In emergencies, children are at a higher risk of being trafficked or exploited.	Efforts are made to prevent this through awareness campaigns, monitoring, and swift action against perpetrators.	• Capacity strengthening for staff • Awareness raising among children and families • Cooperation with other stakeholders (e.g., local child protection authorities, police…)
Child Labour	Disruptions caused by emergencies can lead to an increase in child labour.	Programmes are designed to address this issue and create opportunities for children to access education and safe environments.	• Access to education (online or physical attendance) is guaranteed

			• Awareness raising among children, families and staff • Cooperation with other stakeholders (e.g., local child protection authorities, police…)
Healthcare and Nutrition	Adequate healthcare, nutrition, and access to clean water are crucial for children's well-being in emergencies.	Special attention is given to child health and nutrition programmes.	• Basic health check-ups for children upon arrival • Referral pathways in place for more specialised support
Legal Protection	Children's rights and legal safeguards must be upheld even during emergencies.	This includes preventing child recruitment into armed groups and ensuring that children are treated fairly under the law.	• Support with legal documentation • Establish processes for replacing lost or destroyed registration cards, and for obtaining cards for new arrivals
Coordination and Collaboration	Various organisations, governments, and communities work together to coordinate child protection efforts.	Collaboration is key to ensuring that children's needs are met effectively and efficiently. Child protection in emergencies requires a multi-sectoral approach, involving government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), United Nations agencies, communities, and other stakeholders such as local child protection authorities, if existent.	• Member of relevant networks on national and supranational level • Direct contact with national child protection authorities, independent of the nationality of the child, and foreign child protection authorities if possible and in the case of unaccompanied minors
Monitoring and Reporting	Continuous monitoring and reporting mechanisms are established to track the well-being of children and identify any issues that need urgent attention.		• Regular evaluation of emergency support programmes with special attention to the CP component • Reporting as part of the annual internal CP audit
Accountability	Feedback and accountability mechanisms are in place to measure programme performance against community priorities, and actions are taken to adapt the programme based on community feedback.		• Local and child-friendly feedback mechanisms are in place, such as focus group discussions, feedback

		and suggestions boxes, and child-friendly feedback activities • Suggestions for improvement from feedback and evaluations are translated into action to adapt the programmes accordingly

3. Legal frameworks and international standards related to child protection in emergencies

- The *Convention on the Rights of the Child*[1] gives particular attention to the role of the family in providing care to the child, to the special protection needs of children deprived of their family environment and those of asylum-seeking and refugee children. The following **four articles** have been identified as general principles and must be applied to all other articles:
    - **Non-discrimination and equity in the treatment of all children who need protection regardless of their status**
      There shall be no discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinions, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status (Article 2).
    - **The right to survival and development**
      The best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration in all actions affecting children (Article 3).
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    - **The right to participation and inclusion**
      The best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration in all actions affecting children (Article 3).
- Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (CPMS)[2]
  The **2019 Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, or Child Protection Minimum Standards (CPMS),** were developed by members of the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. CONCORDIA was originally developed in 2012 and were updated in 2019. The CPMS are Sphere companion standards.
- Sphere **Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS)**[3]
  The Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS) is a voluntary code that describes the essential elements of principled, accountable and quality humanitarian action. Developed in 2014 through a consultative process, it sets out nine Commitments to which humanitarian actors can adhere to improve the quality of the assistance CONCORDIA provide.

4. Resources: Existing manuals and guidelines

Recommended/mandatory training/skills for practitioners who are working with children in emergencies:

Webinars:

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[1] https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child
[2] https://alliancecpha.org/en/cpms-child-protection-minimum-standards
[3] https://spherestandards.org/humanitarian-standards/core-humanitarian-standard/

- Webinars, trainings etc. on the **Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (CPMS) by the Alliance CPHA**
  https://alliancecpha.org/en/child-protection-minimum-standards-working-group
  An Introduction to Prevention with the Child Protection Minimum Standards
  By the Alliance CPHA
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7gN7Xb4-OYI
  and other videos on their channel https://www.youtube.com/@TheAllianceCPHA
- **Eastern European Safeguarding Hub**
  https://easterneurope.safeguardingsupporthub.org/ee/whatissafeguarding#

E-learning courses:

- **Caring for Children Moving Alone: Protecting Unaccompanied and Separated Children** (free resource)
  By University of Strathclyde, Glasgow and Caring for Children Moving Alone MOOC Taskforce
  https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/caring-for-children-moving-alone
- **Child Protection in Emergencies** [Entry Level] (free resource)
  By Humanitarian Leadership Academy and Save the Children
  https://kayaconnect.org/course/info.php?id=3567

Glossary

Child

Children are people between 0 and 18 years of age.

Unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) require particular and urgent protection. Also termed "unaccompanied minors", CONCORDIA are children 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. **Separated children** are children separated from both parents, or from their previous legal or customary primary caregiver, but not necessarily from other relatives. These may, therefore, include children accompanied by other adult family members. UASCs are at higher risk of violence and exploitation than children travelling with parents or other groups.

Best interest of the child

In 1989, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) formalized the best interest principle as a primary consideration in all decisions affecting individual children or groups of children, "aimed at ensuring both the full and effective enjoyment of all the rights recognized in the Convention and the holistic development of the child." (Art. 3). The best interest of the child is determined by a variety of individual circumstances, such as the age, gender, level of maturity and experiences of the child. Other factors also determine well-being, such as the presence or

absence of parents, the quality of the relationships between the child and their family or caregivers, the physical and psychosocial situation of the child and their protection situation.

Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) on 20 November 1989, is the main legal instrument protecting the rights of the child and brings together the children's human rights articulated in other international instruments which include, among others, the need for protection from abuse, exploitation and neglect, and the importance of children's physical, emotional and cognitive development

Safe spaces including Child Friendly Spaces (CFS)

Safe spaces including Child Friendly Spaces (CFS) increase children's access to safe environments and promote their psychosocial well-being. Some Safe Spaces may focus on informal education or other needs related to children. All provide a child-centred place where children can come together to play, relax, express themselves, feel supported, and learn skills to build their resilience.

This addendum to the Child Safeguarding Policy was written and compiled by Eva Okonofua, Senior Programme Advisor, with the support of Radu Neuman and other NCFP. The policy has been reviewed and approved my Martina Raytchinova, International Programme Director and International responsible for Child Protection in CONCORDIA.