Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action

28 March 2023

Key points

- If child protection work is below standard, or work in other areas does not meet child protection mainstreaming standards, it can be ineffective or even cause harm.

- All child protection actors are likely to use and talk about the CPMS: UNHCR staff therefore need to know them too. Though refugee settings may be specific in some respects, the CPMS are a useful tool in all emergencies.

- Protection colleagues can use the CPMS for technical guidance on child protection, and for training and strategy development.

- The CPMS are a practical and useful tool for UNHCR programme and protection colleagues when reviewing proposals from partners.

- Be sure to adapt the CPMS to your context, and use them as a planning tool with partners.

1. Overview

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. They were originally developed in 2012, and were updated in 2019. The CPMS are Sphere companion standards. They were not developed specifically for refugee situations but most are applicable to all settings and should guide UNHCR’s child protection emergency response. They complement UNHCR-specific child protection guidance, for example, on Best Interest Procedure (BIP) and the Framework for the Protection of Children, etc.; but they do not address specific issues relating to children in refugee procedures, such as registration, Refugee Status Determination (RSD), or durable solutions. For these procedures, specific UNHCR guidance applies. UNHCR participated in developing the CPMS and is committed to ensuring that they are used for all children of concern during child protection emergency response.
2. Main guidance

Emergency standard

There are 28 standards in the CPMS, organised in 4 categories (see the diagram below):

- Standards to ensure a quality child protection response.
- Standards on child protection risks.
- Standards to develop adequate child protection strategies.
- Standards to work across sectors.

Each standard includes:

- A ‘statement’ of the standard that explains the goal.
- Key actions for preparedness and response that provide a sort of checklist for a quality response.
- Indicators and targets for measurement of the standard.
- Guidance notes to support operationalization of the standard.
- Key resources to provide further information and tools.

In an emergency, UNHCR operations should consider which areas of work in child protection are priorities in the situation, and ensure that the applicable standards are met or on track to being met. The CPMS were developed for emergencies but include preparedness and early recovery, and can also provide guidance in protracted situations.

3. Links


4. Main contacts

Contact the Child Protection Unit. At: HQCHIPRO@unhcr.org,