

Child Protection



In conflict and disaster, children usually suffer first and suffer most. The number of countries experiencing conflict is at its highest point since the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989—as a result, one in four of the world’s children lives in a conflict or disaster zone today.

Humanitarian crises often have long-lasting and devastating effects on children’s lives. The child-protection risks children face include family separation,

recruitment into armed forces or groups, physical and sexual abuse, psychosocial distress, economic exploitation, injury and even death. Around the world, more than 30 million children have been displaced by conflict, with many trafficked, exploited and abused, and many lacking access to such basic services as health and education.

Child-protection actors seek to prevent and respond to all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation. During humanitarian crises, timely interventions support the physical and emotional health, dignity and well-being of children, families and communities. International Medical Corps is responding to some of the world’s most severe emergencies by providing child-protection support and services across different contexts.



International Medical Corps implements child-protection programs according to the needs of children, their families and communities across a range of different contexts. Primary considerations at all levels of programming include the safety and well-being of children, and the desire to protect them from all forms of violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect.

All actions we take are guided by the best interests of the child. We improve the protective environment for children by providing high-quality child-centered and family-focused services, acknowledging that child participation is key and that building upon children's strengths and resilience must occur alongside reducing or eliminating risks.

We deliver services through child-friendly spaces, community centers and mobile teams, with activities that range from awareness-raising about child protection and the services and support available (including community-based support), to specialized programming that includes case management and counseling for individual children at risk of harm.

CHILD AND ADOLESCENT SAFE SPACES

These spaces provide a safe and structured environment in which trained staff and volunteers conduct age-specific focused and non-focused child well-being activities for both individuals and groups.

Group activities, which can provide a sense of normalcy, offer children the opportunity to come together in a predictable and stimulating environment, to be safe, to learn, to express themselves, to make connections, and to feel supported. Activities include arts and crafts, games, sports, theater and music. Such activities can also help us further our protection aims by giving staff the opportunity to identify children who are vulnerable or experiencing abuse, neglect, exploitation or violence, and make appropriate referrals.

We also engage parents and caregivers through key messaging about parenting skills and support services, and through participation in community-based activities.





CHILD PROTECTION CASE MANAGEMENT

When child-protection staff, or staff from other service providers, identify children as being at risk of harm because of abuse, neglect or exploitation, they refer these children for case management services. A qualified child-protection case manager supports children and their families in a systematic and timely manner through direct support and referrals, providing individualized, coordinated, holistic, multisectoral support for complex and often interconnected child-protection concerns. International Medical Corps offers case management in line with global standards and best practices, and ensures that case managers have the support, supervision and coaching they need to provide quality services and ensure the safety and well-being of children.



CHILD PROTECTION COUNSELING

Children requiring more intensive therapeutic support may be referred for child-protection counseling—a child- and family-centered specialist service where the overarching purpose is to work toward the recovery and ongoing safety and well-being of children and youth affected by child-protection concerns. Counselors help children and young people recover from violence, abuse or neglect, and address the effects of abuse and trauma on their lives

Child-protection counselors also help parents and caregivers make positive changes so that they are better able to support their children's safety and well-being.

PARENTING SUPPORT

Parents and caregivers play a significant role in strengthening children's capacity to cope with stressful situations, particularly in humanitarian situations. Supporting parents and caregivers is an important component of child-protection programming, helping families provide children with caring and protective environments, and ensuring healthy caregiver-child relationships, with responsive and supportive caregivers.

International Medical Corps implements a range of parenting-support programs, including individual and group counseling support and parenting skills programs that follow set curriculums.



SYRIA

Children are bearing the brunt of the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, one of the world's most protracted and severe emergencies. More than 6.1 million children require assistance, 3.1 million children are internally displaced, and more than 2.5 million children are living as refugees outside of the country. International Medical Corps' child-protection programming in response to the Syrian crisis—both inside Syria and in surrounding countries—remains a significant area of focus for us.

Our child protection prevention and response activities in Syria aim to create a protective environment where children and young people can learn, receive support, interact, express their feelings, and build confidence and a sense of belonging and empowerment. We also provide case management for children who are identified as being at risk of harm.

Our programs help children develop life skills, gain more independence, build self-confidence and have experiences that can lead them to make healthier life choices and actively participate in their families and community. These activities include group psychosocial services and recreational activities for child well-being and a youth empowerment program for adolescents that promotes healthy behaviors and supports at-risk youth.

For parents and caregivers, we offer parenting skills and support, engage them in awareness sessions and engage them throughout the case management process when providing this service to their children.

GAZA

Being a child in the Gaza Strip has always been extremely difficult, as many children have lived through escalating violence. Schools and health facilities have been damaged, homes and offices have been flattened and families have been displaced, with devastating impacts on children.

In May 2021, International Medical Corps responded to the violent escalation in conflict by introducing a child-protection program funded by USAID's Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance.

With further funding, the program has continued to expand to meet ongoing needs.

Because communities can help prevent, as well as respond to, child-protection risks, our team in Gaza takes a community-based approach by providing child-protection services at safe spaces in local organizations. We help these organizations build staff capacity, raise awareness and train volunteers to provide prevention and response services to children experiencing violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation. We offer case management, parenting skills and early-childhood development courses, and structured skill-building and recreational activities for children ages 6 to 18.

CAMEROON

Humanitarian needs in Cameroon are driven by armed conflict, inter-community violence, an influx of refugees from neighboring countries, seasonal flooding and outbreaks of disease, including cholera and measles—all compounded by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. About 2.3 million children are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance.

Our Safe Healing and Learning Spaces offer a safe, caring and predictable environment where children and adolescents can go during the day to ensure that they are learning and developing socially and emotionally. These spaces include an outdoor area for team games and sports, as well as an indoor area where children and youth can receive help with socio-emotional learning, reading and math, and where caregivers can engage in parenting skills sessions.

Our Cameroon program also offers case management, including for children who are in need of alternative care; a youth empowerment program; vocational training; and psychosocial support activities for caregivers.

We involve governmental actors—including Ministry of Basic Education, Ministry of Employment and Vocational training, Ministry of Social Affairs and Ministry of Youth and Civic Education—to ensure ownership of our projects and to support sustainability and exit strategies. We also work with the National Civil Status Office and other partners to help children at risk of statelessness to obtain birth certificates.



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A pre-eminent first responder since 1984, International Medical Corps delivers emergency medical and related services to those affected by conflict, disaster and disease, no matter where they are, no matter what the conditions. We also train people in their communities, providing them with the skills they need to recover, chart their own path to self-reliance and become effective first responders themselves.

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