

Child Protection

In recent years, there has been a troubling rise in the number and severity of humanitarian crises, leading to more children experiencing different forms of violence, abuse and exploitation.

In 2023, a record 400 million children—or one in six—lived in conflict settings and faced severe violations such as killing, maiming and sexual violence.

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 implements child-protection programs across different contexts in the Middle East, Africa and Asia, helping to ensure that children are safe in their communities and receive support when they experience harm.



International Medical Corps' child-protection programs are designed and implemented according to the needs of children, their families and communities. 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. We engage communities in the protection of children by understanding and building on existing community capacities, structures and processes around children, helping to create supportive community environments that respond when children are at risk.

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 also help further our protection aims by giving staff the opportunity to identify children who are vulnerable or experiencing abuse, neglect, exploitation or violence, and to 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 violence, 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 and multisectoral support for complex and often interconnected child-protection concerns. This includes support for unaccompanied and separated children, such as family tracing and support for kinship and foster care.

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 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 during crisis. Supporting parents and caregivers is an important component of child-protection programming. This includes helping families to provide children with caring and protective environments, and ensuring children have healthy relationships with responsive and supportive caregivers to reduce the overall risk of child abuse and neglect.

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



JORDAN

There are 3.8 million children under 18 in Jordan—more than 40% of the population. Of these children, almost 30% are non-Jordanian—including many refugees from neighboring countries. Refugee and other vulnerable children face significant child-protection concerns. For girls, this includes early marriage. Boys are more likely to drop out of school because of violence or to work to support their families. Children with disabilities, unaccompanied or separated children, children from marginalized communities and children living and/or working on the streets also face hardships. Children with disabilities face greater challenges accessing education and services, while children living in vulnerable communities are at risk of increased poverty and negative coping mechanisms.

International Medical Corps has been a leader in child-protection programming in Jordan since 2012. Working alongside UN, government and local partners, our program reaches children and their families with a range of prevention and response services, including comprehensive case management, counselling, psychosocial support services, a youth empowerment program and parenting support. We focus on building the capacity of the community to identify and respond to child-protection concerns, and on initiatives and activities focused on prevention. As we work toward sustainable approaches, we have recently integrated a livelihoods component to support caregivers and address protection concerns stemming from negative coping mechanisms.

AFGHANISTAN

In Afghanistan—where half of the country's 30 million inhabitants are under 18—children face violence and abuse arising from conflict, displacement and economic struggles. This dire situation has led to a significant increase in child casualties and exposes Afghan girls to early marriage, honor killings and sexual violence, while boys face military recruitment and sexual exploitation. Hazardous labor, landmines and violence at home pose threats to children of both genders.

In 2023, International Medical Corps launched a child-protection program in Afghanistan to address the complex

needs of vulnerable children within the community. Our child-protection teams deliver comprehensive services for children and caregivers at Children and Family Social Centers. Services include case management, group activities for children, and initiatives to support families, caregivers and the community. Additionally, we focus on enhancing community awareness of child protection, in collaboration with the mental health and psychosocial support team and through community well-being groups.

GAZA

Being a child in the Gaza Strip has always been extremely difficult, as many children have lived through a lifetime of escalating violence, but the situation in Gaza today is catastrophic. Since October 2023, thousands of children have been killed, injured, taken hostage, orphaned or separated from their families. Children in the Gaza Strip have been exposed to deeply distressing events marked by widespread destruction, relentless attacks, displacement and severe shortages of essential necessities such as food, water and medicine.

International Medical Corps' child-protection program, established in 2021, has responded to the crisis by providing services adapted to current needs and the security situation. Activities previously conducted in coordination with local organizations throughout Gaza are now taking place in child-friendly spaces established within International Medical Corps' field hospitals.

Our child-protection team provides services aimed at supporting children's safety and well-being—including vital services for unaccompanied and separated children, who are some of the most vulnerable. We provide case management to address children's protection concerns and link children with appropriate services, including family tracing, alternative care and referrals to other services as needed. We also provide psychological first aid and individual counselling to support children in distress; psychosocial support and recreational activities to provide a sense of normalcy and the opportunity for play; and awareness sessions to provide parents with resources to support parenting challenges in times of crisis.



www.InternationalMedicalCorps.org

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.

July 2024

CONTACT INFO: **Lucy Cracknell, Senior Child Protection Advisor, Global Technical Unit**

lcracknell@InternationalMedicalCorps.org

International Medical Corps is headquartered in Los Angeles, CA, and has offices in Washington, DC; London, UK; and Split, Croatia.

For contact information, visit [InternationalMedicalCorps.org/contact](https://www.InternationalMedicalCorps.org/contact).