

Holding the line – Why partnerships and principles matter more than ever

Blog by: Steve Miller, Director of Child Protection, Save the Children

In a [recent global survey](#), over 1,000 local and national actors from 41 countries voiced what many of us already feel: the humanitarian system is changing, and not always for the better. Funding cuts are hollowing out frontline services. Technical expertise – particularly in child protection – is being stretched, consolidated, and lost. We know that behind these shifts are people – experienced colleagues exiting the sector, vital programmes shut down, and the toll this takes on those left holding the line.

Yet alongside the loss, a quiet realignment is underway – not led by any single agency or donor, but by a deeper recognition that no organisation can go it alone. That in this fractured moment, our resilience may lie in how we work – deliberately, and together.

As a founding member of the [Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action](#), Save the Children has long believed in the power of collective leadership. The Alliance was never just a technical platform. It's been a stabilising force – a shared commitment to hold the line for child protection when the system falters: through shared standards, coordinated advocacy, and principled reflection.

[The Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action](#) are more than just a guidance document. They are a framework for quality, a safeguard against fragmentation, and a shared language. In a sector grappling with reduced specialisation, this becomes even more critical – not just to ensure accountability, but to maintain a common sense of purpose.

The Alliance's recent [Strategic Brief](#) reaffirms what many of us have come to understand in our own organisations: children and their protection must remain central – not only in response, but in the way we design, coordinate, and fund humanitarian action. This is not a rhetorical point – it's a structural one.

At Save the Children, we've taken steps to reflect this reality. We've unified our humanitarian and development functions. We've restructured around our three '[Breakthroughs](#)' – one of which places child protection at its core. We are narrowing our focus to deepen our impact – even as we grapple, like many others, with fewer resources and leaner teams.

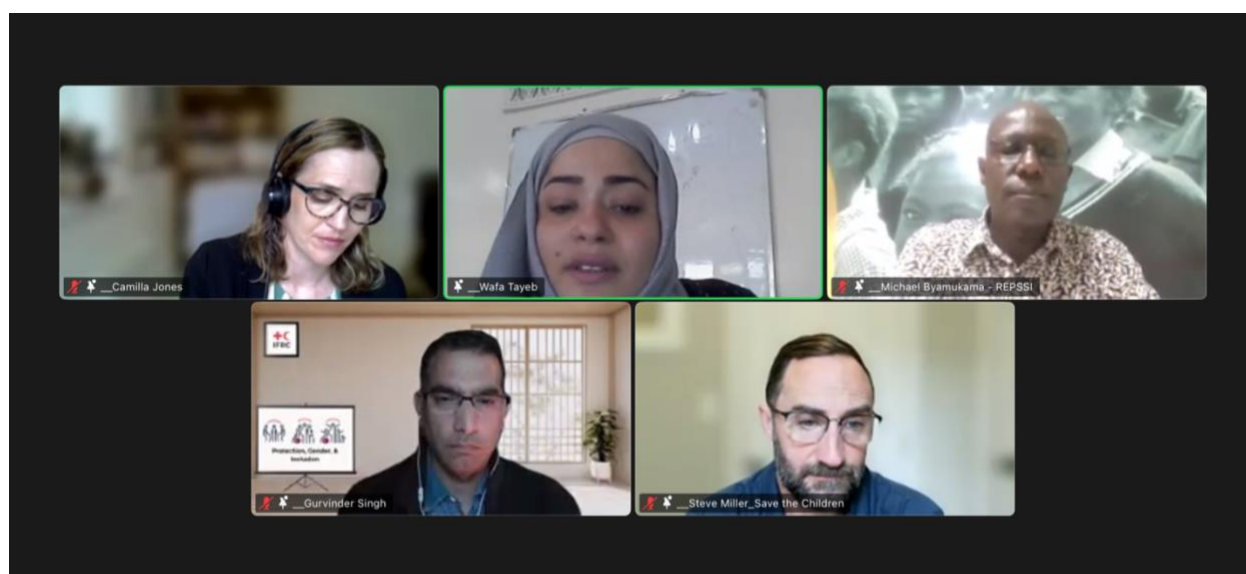
In this context, the Alliance is not optional – it's essential. It provides us with more than tools – it offers space. Space to reflect, to test new ways of working, to listen. And perhaps most importantly, space to stand together when the centre begins to shift. As we saw at the [2025 Annual Meeting](#) – a timely opportunity to come together, share realities, and collectively consider where we go next.

This is not a moment for quick fixes or false optimism. It's a reckoning – and a recalibration. But if we hold to what has made our work meaningful – principled action, grounded expertise, and genuine collaboration – we can help steady the system, even as it shifts around us.



Those of us working across leadership, governance, and programming know this is not easy work. But it is necessary. Let's protect what matters. Let's stay in the hard conversations. And let's keep – children and their protection – exactly where it belongs, at the centre of humanitarian action.

Find the **"The Centrality of Child Protection in a Changing Humanitarian Landscape"** session recording [here](#).



*Editors Note: **Be part of the child protection movement and join the Alliance Community of Practice today:** <https://www.changemakersforchildren.community/join-the-movement>*