

Primary Prevention in Humanitarian Action: An Integrated Approach

What is Primary Prevention in Child Protection:

Primary prevention seeks to avert harm before it occurs by addressing the root causes of harmful outcomes to all children within a population or community. It does this by reducing risk factors, which are threats and vulnerabilities that increase the probability of a harmful outcome happening, and strengthening protective factors, which are capacities within the child social ecology that help mitigate specific threats to child's protection and well-being. For example: the likelihood of children going into child labour is reduced by improving access to livelihood opportunities, decreasing the risk of school dropout of children, and addressing harmful social norms.

Who does it target: A primary prevention approach works at the **population level**, which means the whole society or a sub-population, such as a village or a community. Interventions under a primary prevention program target populations of children that share a group characteristic. For example, all children in an internally displaced persons camp aged 0-5 or all girls in an urban area aged 12-18.

How does it work: Addressing the root causes of child protection harms requires a multi-sector response, and primary prevention is multi-sectoral by nature. While child protection actors lead in analysing risks, effective solutions lie across sectors. For example, school feeding programs reduce school dropout and associated risks like child labour, and livelihood support can mitigate early marriage or child recruitment. Evidence shows that such collaboration not only protects children but also advances sectoral goals. When combined with traditional child protection efforts like parenting programmes, the outcomes for children improve significantly.

How do humanitarian sectors contribute to primary prevention?

Each humanitarian sector has its priorities, strategies and protocols to follow. However, all sectors share a common responsibility under the Centrality of Protection principle to place protection, including that of children, at the centre of humanitarian action.

The role of different humanitarian actors is to collaborate with Child Protection teams to prevent harmful outcomes for children by contributing to strengthened protective factors and decreased risk factors that fall within their area of expertise. Their involvement will depend on the context and prevalence of harmful child protection outcomes. For example:

- If **access to quality education** is identified by communities as a **protective factor to prevent child marriage**, then universal safe access to quality education for all children in the camp will be an appropriate intervention. The planning and designing of this intervention should be done **jointly by the Education and Child Protection actors**.

- If in a drought-stricken area of a country, **lack of stable income** is identified as a **risk factor for child labour**, interventions to improve the knowledge and ability of caregivers to generate income, will be a primary preventative intervention. The planning and designing of this intervention should be done **jointly by the Livelihoods and Child Protection actors**.
- If limited income or livelihoods opportunities, lack of education opportunities, and tensions with host communities are identified by communities as **risk factors for child labour and exploitation**, then interventions aimed at safe access to education, income generation, and social cohesion will be necessary for a primary preventive approach. The planning and designing of an intervention should be done **jointly by Livelihoods, Social Cohesion/Peace Building, Education and Child Protection actors**.

Note that in most cases, to prevent a harmful outcome, a combination of CP and non-CP interventions will be necessary.

What is the role of Child Protection actors in Primary Prevention?

Child protection actors play a central role in the analysis of priority harmful outcomes and relevant risk and protective factors to inform the design of a primary preventative program. CP actors then work together in coordination with other sector actors to prevent harmful outcomes for children by increasing protective factors and decreasing risk factors. Child Protection actors are responsible for:

1. Analyzing and identifying the harmful outcomes to be prevented,
2. With participation from the affected population and other sectoral actors, determining the risk and protective factors for the prioritised harmful outcomes,
3. Playing a convening role in joint/multi-sectoral planning and implementation of programs to prevent harmful outcomes,
4. Measuring the changes in the risk and protective factors to see if the program is making a difference in the prevention of harmful outcomes,
5. Facilitating systematic and ethical child participation.

Resources

Visit the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action's [Prevention Initiative page](#) where you can find a compilation of resources and tools focused on prevention. You can also watch the short video series to learn more about the importance of prevention for the protection of children in humanitarian action.

For a more detailed and practical understanding of primary prevention approaches and how to implement them, you can refer to the [Primary Prevention Framework for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action](#).