

STRATEGIC SESSION INFORMATION SHEET

Reimagining Child Protection Advocacy in a Changing World

Thursday 11 June 2026, 13:00–14:30 CEST | Annual Meeting for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action 2026

Purpose and framing

Co-facilitated by Elspeth Chapman (the Alliance) and Brikena Zogaj (World Vision International), this session offered an honest, constructive look at the impact and limitations of current child protection advocacy, and asked what needs to change. A live Mentimeter poll invited participants to rate, from one to five, how fit for purpose they consider current child protection advocacy approaches: the average rating was approximately 2.6 out of 5 (18 of 32 respondents), alongside named advocacy wins (the End Violence Against Children ministerial conferences, the Alliance reports on funding cuts, the Global Refugee Youth Consultation, campaigns to end corporal punishment) and recurring challenges — chronic underfunding, fatigue with "child protection is life-saving" messaging, double standards from governments and donors and challenges keeping children at the centre of top-level decisions..

Key discussion points

Panel, moderated by Ghazal Keshavarzian

- **Ghazal Keshavarzian** - the current funding and political crisis is also an opportunity to rethink and reconstruct our work, including our advocacy efforts.
- **Kristen Hope (University of Bath)** — opened with the "impossible trident" optical illusion to illustrate how a single frame can obscure contradictions, then critiqued advocacy's heavy reliance on rights-based framing (drawing on her article "Children Are Targets" and historical touchstones from the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man through the Haitian Revolution to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights). Her call: treat rights as "the floor, not the ceiling," and bring decolonial, anti-racist, and anti-capitalist lenses into analyses and advocacy framing, building on existing resources such as the work of the Reconstructing Children's Rights institute.
- **Janada (youth advocate, Plan International Nigeria)** — spoke to the gap between participation and power: "nothing about us without us" requires shifting resources and decision-making seats to young people, not merely consulting them.

"The people closest to the problem are often closest to the solution. We need to start acting like we believe that."

"When budgets shrink, who's considered important — and whose needs become optional? Because for the child who is out of school, for the girl facing protection risks, and for persons struggling to find hope in a conflict-affected community, these services are not optional."

- **Maria Vargas Simojoki (ECHO)** — offered the donor perspective: advocacy is fundamentally a political strategy, not just an exercise in sharing information. She stressed the need for a thorough stakeholder analysis — understanding power dynamics and who, specifically, within an organisation actually holds influence, rather than assuming any contact can move things forward ("understand the beast"). She also pointed to the value of coordinated advocacy through shared platforms like the Alliance, paired with a targeted approach at different levels. On evidence, her advice was to avoid burying donors in briefs from every side; it's more effective to build momentum around one clear message at a time.

"I think evidence-based is extremely important, and it does have power. It is extremely powerful in terms of advocating forward. I think where we get lost is in the middle ground — how do we package this evidence into something that people who are not protection or child protection practitioners can understand? People who have political choices to make, and who are often negotiating political realities."

- **Sabine Rakotomalala (WHO)** — presented an influence/interest framework for stakeholder mapping — bystanders, defenders, blockers, and drivers — paired with an engagement ladder running from passive interest to ownership and leadership. Her call: work deliberately with "blockers" and cultivate "drivers," be propositional rather than only critical, and step outside the sector's own echo chamber.

Breakout room highlights

BoR1 — Expanding our framing

What the group observed: children's voices are often silenced when they do not fit the prevailing narrative; organisations tend to use passive language about perpetrators and parties to conflict; international humanitarian and human rights law (IHL/IHRL) are under attack globally with little pushback; children's rights are increasingly challenged by powerful states; rights-based language feels distant from parents' actual ability to keep children safe right now; and it doesn't resonate with other humanitarian sectors.

Suggested shifts: genuinely engage young people and children in shaping the narrative, rather than speaking for them; find additional entry points beyond IHL so the sector is not over-reliant on a single legal framing; translate rights-based arguments into terms other sectors recognise — cost-efficiency, risk management, impact on their own sectoral outcomes; adopt language and terminology young people actually use; use personal-connection framing ("the asylum seeker next door") to counter disillusionment and distance; and frame child protection as protecting a community's stability and future, not only the individual child.

In the closing report-back, this group added a further idea: drawing on indigenous ways of knowing to imagine "alternative futures" — framing advocacy around a community's future, not solely the individual child and family, as a way of telling the story differently.

BoR2 — From advocacy to influence

Participants identified four recurring problems. First, advocacy messages are often unclear and fragmented: the sector tends to push too many asks at once, diluting impact, while donors reported fatigue from receiving multiple, uncoordinated messages from different actors — pointing to a need for fewer, clearer, more coordinated asks. Second, child protection struggles for visibility: even though children make up a large share of those affected by crises, donor conversations are usually framed around sectors like health, WASH, food security, or education, rather than a broader, child-centred narrative. Third, there is limited collaboration between field practitioners and advocacy actors — bringing operational reality together with influencing expertise was seen as key to credible messaging, alongside engaging a wider range of stakeholders, including the private sector. Fourth, advocacy has not fully adapted to a changing political and value landscape: much of the sector's messaging was built for an era with more shared values, and now needs reframing around today's political concerns — human security, stability, and broader societal outcomes — without compromising humanitarian principles.

BoR3 — Child, youth and community leadership (Janada)

Participants identified concrete examples of children and young people genuinely shaping advocacy — peer-to-peer sessions, paid roles for young advocates with lived experience, exposure conferences, school-based dialogues — alongside barriers that keep leadership tokenistic. Recommended shifts: strengthen child-participation frameworks that support government policy, follow up to ensure young people's input actually feeds decision-making, use contextualised and age-appropriate language, extend engagement beyond school settings into communities, and invest in system strengthening that enables genuine child participation. In the closing report-back, Janada distilled the group's message simply: "nothing about us without us" — those most affected by the challenges should help shape the solutions, given the platforms and support to do so.

BoR4 — Rethinking the child protection narrative

Participants agreed current messaging often feels tired or misunderstood, especially in contexts with limited frontline workforce capacity. Suggested reframing: talk about child protection through Adverse Childhood Experiences and lived experience; use action-oriented, transparent, evidence-based messaging built on data about affected children's lives; target messages to specific decision-makers, framing advocacy so that "blockers" can see a win too (for example linking child protection to a government's existing security or migration priorities); mainstream child protection within other sectors and financing streams (health, cash programming) where standalone funding is unavailable; and use return-on-investment framing that presents child protection as a solution, not just a need.

In the closing report-back, the group distilled this into three levels to carry forward: (1) problem framing — name clearly what child protection resolves, breaking down the evidence and linking it to other sectors; (2) solution framing — show how children can flourish, supported by return-on-investment evidence; and (3) audience framing — tailor the message to what each decision-maker already prioritises, for example security or migration concerns.

Next steps and recommendations

- Shift from broad rights-based messaging towards audience-specific framing — Adverse Childhood Experiences, lived experience, and return-on-investment arguments — piloted with two or three priority donor or government audiences, building directly on what BoR1 and BoR4 tested in this session.
- Alongside audience-specific framing, also explore narrative approaches that centre a community's future and collective wellbeing — including drawing on indigenous ways of knowing to imagine "alternative futures" — as a complementary way of telling the story, building on the point raised in BoR1's closing report-back
- Carry out a more in-depth stakeholder analysis to engage beyond our usual allies — deliberately working with 'blockers' and cultivating 'drivers' — using the influence/interest and engagement-ladder framework as one tool among others.
- Track the fit-for-purpose rating (2.6–2.7 out of 5) as a recurring baseline, reported on each year to show whether advocacy effectiveness is actually improving.
- Build coordination into the sector's advocacy: agree a small number of shared, sequenced asks across members — addressing BoR2's finding that donors report fatigue from fragmented messaging — and use that same coordinated approach to map relationships beyond traditional donors and governments, building propositional, evidence-based narratives that give newly identified audiences a visible "win," while deliberately seeking engagement outside the sector's existing networks and echo chambers.
- Move youth participation from consultation towards meaningful engagement in shaping the Alliance's advocacy work, rather than one-off consultations — the specific mechanisms for this still need to be explored.

The full session recording can be accessed in [English](#), [French](#), [Spanish](#) and [Arabic](#).