TOOL 28

Vulnerability and resilience criteria[1] for differential interventions with unaccompanied and separated Somali and South Sudanese children in the Horn of Africa and Sudan/South Sudan

Introduction

Conflict, food shortages, population displacements and migration flows in the Horn of Africa and South Sudan have led to large numbers of children living apart from their primary caregivers and vulnerable to a range of protection issues. Some of these children, however, may not require targeted child protection interventions, since they might be receiving care and protection from extended kinship networks or exhibit other resiliencies that reduce their level of vulnerability. The vulnerability and resilience criteria set out in the grid on page 4 were designed to support the case management of Somali and South Sudanese children living in situations of displacement both in countries of origin and as refugees across borders. They facilitate a more nuanced analysis of which children should receive different types of interventions, such as case management support, information, signposting to services and monitoring by community-based mechanisms.

Principles for applying vulnerability and resilience criteria

- While unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) are maintained as a central focus of programming, vulnerability and resilience criteria should emphasize interlinking protection issues and the children's resilience (that is, the ability of each child to anticipate, withstand and recover from adversity, based on a child's characteristics and personality traits, and risk and protective factors in their immediate and wider environment), facilitating a more holistic view of each child's protection needs and resources.
- To be effective, the vulnerability and resilience criteria suggested in the grid must be ***adapted according to the context*** in which they are applied.
- While providing a framework for analysing priority needs within an overall caseload, the criteria should be used as a guide only and should ***never supersede the vulnerability and resilience analysis undertaken during the assessment of an individual child's protection needs***.

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[1] Drafted in consultation with the Inter-agency Working Group for Unaccompanied and Separated Children, 2013. These criteria and accompanying matrix can be adapted for different contexts.

■ Children's ***vulnerabilities and resilience change over time*** as the developing child interacts with an evolving context and as personal circumstances change. Community-based mechanisms should be enabledcapacitated to ensure monitoring of children so that children with protection and support needs are identified and referred for assessment and support, as appropriate.

Five dimensions of vulnerability and resilience (*see grid on page 4*)

1. *Degrees of separation*

   While maintaining the standard distinction between 'unaccompanied' and 'separated', this dimension facilitates differentiation between separated children living with close relatives and those living within extended kinship systems that may be known or unknown to them. In Somali communities in the Horn of Africa and South Sudanese communities in South Sudan and surrounding countries, it is common for children to spend periods of time away from their primary caregiver but within the kinship system. Children in such care arrangements need not be considered in need of case management unless they meet additional vulnerability criteria.

2. *Contact with caregiver/family of origin*

   Recognizing that many separated children maintain contact and communication with their primary caregivers, and that much family separation is resolved through community and kinship networks, this dimension enables differentiation between children who still have contact with their primary caregiver and those who need support to locate and re-establish contact with them, thereby facilitating the targeting of family tracing interventions. In volatile and fluid contexts, children can fall out of contact with their primary caregivers and may then need to be prioritized for interventions.

3. *Reasons for separation*

   This dimension recognizes the multiple and often interlinking reasons why children become separated from their families, and the impact this may have on their well-being and prospects for reunification. Some separation is accidental. For example, children may lose their caregivers during flight or by force, as when children are escaping from being targets for persecution, such as in abduction or recruitment. While some families may choose to separate, such separation may be considered a negative coping strategy to ensure the survival of individual members of the family in situations of drought or conflict. Other separation may be considered to fall within community norms or may be cyclical to facilitate access to services or participation in agricultural cycles.

4. *Interlinking protection issues*

   This dimension recognizes that, by nature, separation increases children's vulnerability to a range of external risks. Taking a systems-strengthening perspective, the interlinking protection issues require a broader range of response interventions than family tracing and interim care. The first
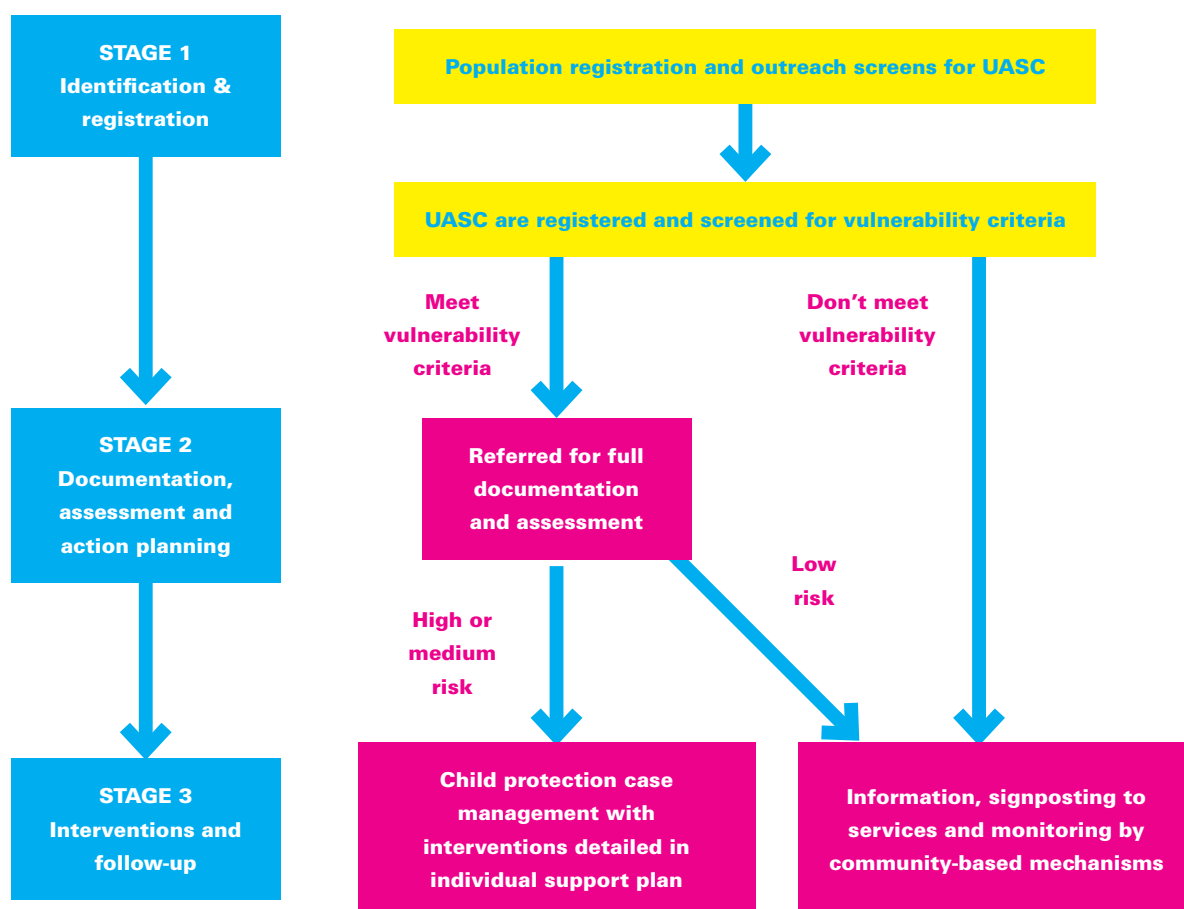
four protection issues listed in column 4 are common in refugee and displacement contexts across the Horn of Africa and South Sudan. Other protection concerns should be identified according to context, through security and/or child protection assessments. Additional protection criteria should then be added to column 4. If certain children are identified through the assessment as at increased risk based on specific characteristics, these characteristics should be added to the final dimension on 'individual characteristics of vulnerability'.

5. *Individual characteristics of vulnerability and resilience*
   This dimension recognizes that certain characteristics make some children more vulnerable to protection risks than others. Children under the age of 5 have specific care needs and should be prioritized for full documentation to maximize opportunities for family tracing. Adolescent girls are at increased risk of sexual abuse and exploitation, including early marriage. Child-headed households can be difficult to place in interim care and may require monitoring and support to live independently. Children with disabilities and chronic illnesses, including HIV, are at increased risk of abuse, neglect and social exclusion, and may require support to access specialized services. Underage mothers may also need support to access health and nutrition services and to care for and protect their children and themselves.

Differential interventions

In the grid of vulnerability and resilience criteria on page 4, those categories that should be used to prioritize children for a case management assessment are highlighted in bold text. This means that ***if a child meets any one of these criteria, he/she should be individually documented and assessed for case management needs***. Separated children who meet the italicized criteria in the first three columns should be registered, but may not need to be prioritized for individual documentation and assessment. Through the individual assessment process, child protection case workers should categorize each child as at high, medium or low risk. Those who are considered to be low risk can be referred for information, signposting and monitoring by community-based mechanisms. A plan should be developed to guide the full case management of those who are considered to be high or medium risk.

STAGE 1
Identification & registration

Population registration and outreach screens for UASC

UASC are registered and screened for vulnerability criteria

Meet vulnerability criteria

Don't meet vulnerability criteria

STAGE 2
Documentation, assessment and action planning

Referred for full documentation and assessment

Low risk

High or medium risk

STAGE 3
Interventions and follow-up

Child protection case management with interventions detailed in individual support plan

Information, signposting to services and monitoring by community-based mechanisms

Instructions for Use

1. Contextualize the vulnerability and resilience criteria and standardize across child protection agencies:

   a. Remove, add and adapt definitions according to context.

   b. Undertake an assessment of security and protection risks to children in the population.

2. Adapt screening, registration and documentation tools to reflect definitions and capture vulnerability criteria and resilience indicators:

   a. Ensure that population registration tools are adapted to screen for unaccompanied and separated children.

   b. Ensure that registration tools incorporate vulnerability criteria and resilience indicators.

3. Establish referral, information-sharing procedures and data protection protocols to ensure that information on unaccompanied and separated

VULNERABILITY CRITERIA FOR DIFFERENTIATING INTERVENTIONS FOR UNACCOMPANIED AND SEPARATED CHILDREN

1. Degrees of separation	2. Contact with caregiver/family of origin	3. Reasons for separation	4. Interlinking protection issues	5. Individual characteristics of vulnerability/ resilience
Unaccompanied **5.**	**No contact and does not know where they are** **5.**	**Targeted for persecution[2]** **4.**	**Survivor of sexual violence**	**Children under the age of 5** **5.**
Separated staying with unknown clan member **4.**	**No contact but knows where they are** **3.**	**Abandoned/orphaned** **4.**	**Association with armed group or armed force**	**Adolescent girls (age 12–17)** **4.**
Separated staying with unknown relative **3.**		**During displacement/ population movement** **3.**	**Children in conflict with the law**	**Child-headed households** **4.**
Separated staying with known clan member *2.*	*Some communication* *2.*	*Relocated because of food shortage/loss of livelihoods* *2.*	**Smuggling/trafficking**	**Children with disabilities/chronic illness** **4.**
Separated staying with known relative *1.*	*Frequent communication* *1.*	*Seasonal migration/ access to services/ search for opportunities* *1.*	**Current security and protection risks in context**	**Underage mother** **4.**

[2] "The term 'persecution' can be considered to involve serious human rights violations, including a threat to life or freedom, as well as other kinds of serious harm or intolerable situations as assessed with regard to the age, opinions, feelings and psychological make-up of the applicant." United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Child Asylum Claims, 2009.

children are passed to the appropriate child protection agency.

4. Train staff and community workers on definitions and vulnerability and resilience criteria and their purpose, and the use of screening, registration and documentation/assessment tools.

5. Monitor and periodically review the effectiveness of vulnerability and resilience criteria for targeting interventions and addressing child protection risks, and continue to adapt criteria/indicators as appropriate.

Additional resources:

International Committee of the Red Cross, *Enhancing Protection for Civilians in Armed Conflict and Other Situations of Violence*, ICRC, 2012, <www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/publication/p0956.htm>, accessed 1 February 2016.