TABLE 3

BEST PRACTICES IN ASSESSMENTS OF FAMILY SEPARATION

An ethical approach to assessment demands:	• A commitment to **follow-up** action, if required. • Establishing a **referral pathway** prior to the assessment for any cases requiring urgent follow-up or care. • Refraining from taking action if the **local community** can cope by itself, unless its actions violate the basic rights of children. • Avoiding the creation of **false expectations**. • Avoiding methods that could **stigmatize** children, endanger them in any way or increase the incidence of family separation.
Assessments should ideally be conducted:	• By using different methodologies among different segments of the population to give a full picture of separation; however **multiple assessments of the same type in the same location should be avoided**. • By a **team with training and experience in family separation** in emergencies, including assessment methods, child-friendly interviewing and informed consent. • By team members with **knowledge of the context** (specifically, the historical, social and political situation), or those thoroughly briefed on pre-existing separation issues in the region. • With due regard for the **confidentiality of information**, ensuring that all assessors understand the need for confidentiality, that systems are in place for safe transmission and storage of data/information collected, and agreement exists on information-sharing. • With the **active participation of members of the affected community**, including children and families. In highly politicized circumstances, careful judgement must be exercised in the choice of team members who may wish to pursue their own agenda. • In ways that **build on and are informed by existing knowledge and documentation**, particularly any assessments undertaken in the preparedness phase (*see Chapter 5.1*). • In ways that **engage children's participation** (where this is safe, meaningful and appropriate), consider their opinions and wishes, and are age-, gender- and culturally sensitive, using 'child-friendly' listening and interviewing techniques. • Using **direct observation and key informant interviews with a broad and gender-balanced range of key community informants and leaders**, including children, religious leaders, women's groups, local and national authorities, teachers, health workers, soldiers, prison authorities, orphanage staff and staff of local and international organizations. • **In places where UASC are likely to be found**, including in hospitals, prisons and all forms of residential care. • In such a way as to **sensitize** the community, the authorities, non-governmental organizations and others regarding issues related to family separation.
Assessments should consider:	• **Analysis of the causes and patterns of separation.** • **Numbers of all UASC in various locations disaggregated** by age and sex. • **Identification of groups of children at special risk**, such as those who are disabled or chronically ill, associated with armed forces or armed groups, or in detention (or whose parent are in detention), children who are parents and head households, adolescent girls, babies and very young children. • **Information on local practices and types of care arrangements** in place for UASC before and during the crisis. • **Reports or evidence of missing children**, including estimated numbers and potential causes (ensuring referrals where relevant to other organizations, such as the ICRC). • **Reports or evidence of children being taken away** from their community, including estimated numbers and information about who is taking them away and for what reason. • **Analysis of measures taken by the community** itself and its resources, such as community members with transferable skills, such as social workers, or active youth groups, such as scouts. • **Analysis of the potential impact of relief programmes** on family unity. • **Identification of factors with the potential to cause new separations or aggravate the circumstances** of children already separated, such as patterns and degrees of violence, mortality rates, displacement, climatic conditions, lack of food security and access to basic services, lack of income-generating activities, recruitment into armed forces or armed groups, and residential care provision.

(Adapted from International Committee of the Red Cross, International Rescue Committee, Save the Children UK, United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, World Vision, *The Inter-agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children*, ICRC, 2004, pp. 30-32)