

# Core Commitments for Children in Emergencies

For every child  
Health, Education, Equality, Protection  
ADVANCE HUMANITY



# CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Humanitarian response.....	2
Guiding principles .....	2
Operating approach.....	2
Rapid assessment.....	3
Coordination .....	6
Programme commitments.....	7
Health and nutrition .....	7
Water, sanitation and hygiene.....	9
Child protection .....	10
Education.....	13
HIV/AIDS .....	15
Operational commitments.....	16
Security.....	16
Fund-raising and communication .....	18
Human resources .....	19
Information technology and telecommunications .....	21
Supply and logistics.....	22
Finance and administration .....	23

Organizational preparedness and support.....	25
Country office.....	25
Regional office .....	27
Headquarters.....	28

# INTRODUCTION

Since its inception, UNICEF's mandate has involved the rapid response to humanitarian crises. Our continuing presence in more than 150 countries and territories means that we are often on the spot long before, and long after, a crisis or unstable situation occurs.

UNICEF's role in emergencies is to protect children and women, ensure the rigorous application of international standards covering their rights and provide them with assistance. We work with many partners to ensure that this assistance is reliable, effective and timely.

Today, as the number of emergencies rises, their complexity is also increasing. They present an added threat to children's rights. Therefore, our role is now more important than ever before, and our work has adapted to reflect that reality.

This document, UNICEF's Core Commitments for Children in Emergencies, builds on our experience in recent crises and outlines our initial response in protecting and caring for children and women. It states our core response at all levels of the organization.

# HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. Children in the midst of armed conflict and natural disasters such as drought, floods and earthquakes have the same needs and rights as children in stable countries.
2. Our response will recognize the priority of humanitarian action while assuring safe access to affected populations and safety and security of staff and assets.
3. The emergency response will build on existing activities and partnerships developed through the country programme of cooperation.
4. The response will be based on nationally defined priorities and UNICEF's comparative advantage.

## OPERATING APPROACH

1. Conduct a rapid assessment to identify priority humanitarian action for children.

2. Implement a valid and reliable system to monitor, regularly report on and publicize the needs of children and evaluate the impact of the response.
3. Establish UNICEF's response as part of a coordinated United Nations response plan, designed in collaboration with national and other partners.
4. Position UNICEF in sector-coordinating roles, as appropriate.
5. Put in place operational systems and resources for rapid delivery of supplies and technical assistance.
6. Operationalize humanitarian response mechanisms that prevent and limit the exposure of children and women to abuse, violence, exploitation and HIV/AIDS.

## **RAPID ASSESSMENT**

In consultation and collaboration with partners, UNICEF will carry out a rapid assessment of the situation of children and women. Drawing upon data compiled in the preparedness phase, this situation analysis will determine the exact nature of the crisis, including potential developments, implications for the rights of children and women, and the required programmatic response, operational modalities and security.

## **First six to eight weeks**

1. Immediately conduct a rapid assessment (inter-agency or independently, as appropriate) within the first 48-72 hours to determine:
  - programmatic needs in health and nutrition, education, child protection, water supply and sanitation, HIV/AIDS and other salient child rights issues
  - factors affecting the organization's capacity to function in the field: e.g., the presence of national telecommunications and infrastructure, access and mobility, the availability/readiness of office infrastructure, vehicles, warehousing and human resources for UNICEF and/or agencies working in the area.

This requires compiling basic data acquired through secondary research, collecting new data from immediate site visits, and analysing and extrapolating data previously compiled in the preparedness phase. This first rapid assessment will provide the basis for UNICEF's programmatic response.

2. Through rapid assessment and other means, gather information necessary for UNICEF to effectively report on and advocate for children's rights through the appropriate channels.
3. Within the first week, develop a simple data-collection plan for one month, covering key data gaps as required for the continued emergency response. This brief plan will

identify: data gaps regarding children's and women's rights; key questions to be monitored regarding the immediate implementation of the programme response (i.e., potential bottlenecks); an outline of focused assessments or field visits to cover these data needs; and resources to cover data-collection activities. Ideally, the plan should also reflect key data-collection activities by other organizations that might contribute to its overall effectiveness.

4. Collect and update information and report through the appropriate mechanisms on the situation of children and any violations of their rights.

### **Beyond initial response**

5. Conduct an expanded rapid assessment (inter-agency or independently, as appropriate) to provide information that will feed into a medium-term response, e.g., a 100-day plan. This will also draw from secondary data from other organizations and will be a synthesis/analysis exercise if field data collection has continued through the first three weeks, or will require a second intensive field data-collection exercise.
6. Develop and implement a minimal Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Plan to support management of the medium-term response with key indicators on implementation and output (e.g., inputs delivered and coverage of therapeutic feeding)

and, where possible, outcome indicators (e.g., on nutritional status), and the information systems to be used (e.g., reporting by partner NGOs and field visits). Identify additional data requirements and collection mechanisms.

## COORDINATION

Ensure that UNICEF's response is part of a coordinated UN response, designed in collaboration with local and other partners. Assume a sector coordinating role, as appropriate.

1. In partnership with UN agencies, national authorities and others, ensure capacity to assume a coordinating role for:
  - Public health
  - Nutrition
  - Child protection
  - Education
  - Water, sanitation and hygiene.
2. Support the UN Resident Coordinator/ Humanitarian Coordinator structure in ensuring a clear coordination mechanism is formed as quickly as possible, including possibilities for creating common systems.
3. Identify partners for interventions in the areas of health, nutrition, education, child protection and water and sanitation, with a clear division of labour.

# PROGRAMME COMMITMENTS

## HEALTH AND NUTRITION

To promote access to essential and quality health and nutritional services, UNICEF, in collaboration with partners, will:

### **First six to eight weeks**

1. Vaccinate all children between 6 months and 14 years of age against measles; at minimum children from 6 months to 4 years of age must be immunized. Provide vaccines and critical inputs such as cold-chain equipment, training and social mobilization expertise and financial support for advocacy and operational costs. Along with the vaccination, provide vitamin A supplementation, as required.
2. Provide essential drugs, emergency health kits, post-rape-care kits where necessary, oral rehydration mix, fortified nutritional products and micronutrient supplements.
3. Provide other emergency supplies such as blankets, tarpaulins and cooking sets.
4. Based on rapid assessments, provide child and maternal feeding: support infant and young child feeding and therapeutic and supplementary feeding programmes with World Food Programme and NGO partners.

5. Introduce nutritional monitoring and surveillance.

### **Beyond initial response**

6. Support the establishment of essential health-care services, by providing outreach services and home-based management of childhood illnesses and emergency obstetric care services, and treatment for malaria, diarrhoea and pneumonia.
7. Provide tetanus toxoid with auto-disable syringes and other critical inputs such as cold-chain equipment, training and behavioural change expertise, and financial support for advocacy and operational costs for immunization of pregnant women and women of childbearing age.
8. Support infant and young child feeding, complementary feeding, and when necessary support therapeutic and supplementary feeding programmes with World Food Programme and NGO partners.
9. Provide health and nutrition education, including messages on the importance of breastfeeding and safe motherhood practices.

## **WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE**

To ensure the provision of safe water and proper sanitation for children and women, UNICEF, in collaboration with partners, will:

### **First six to eight weeks**

1. Ensure the availability of a minimum safe drinking water supply taking into account the privacy, dignity and security of women and girls.
2. Provide bleach, chlorine or water purification tablets, including detailed user and safety instructions in the local language.
3. Provide jerrycans, or an appropriate alternative, including user instructions and messages in the local language on handling of water and disposal of excreta and solid waste.
4. Provide soap and disseminate key hygiene messages on the dangers of cholera and other water- and excreta-related diseases.
5. Facilitate safe disposal of excreta and solid waste by providing shovels or funds for contracting local service companies; spreading messages on the importance of keeping excreta (including infant faeces) buried and away from habitations and public areas; disseminating messages on disposal of human and animal corpses; and giving instructions on, and support for, construction of trench and pit latrines.

## **Beyond initial response**

6. Make approaches and technologies used consistent with national standards, thus reinforcing long-term sustainability.
7. Define UNICEF's continuing involvement beyond the initial response by:
  - Establishing, improving and expanding safe water systems for source development, distribution, purification, storage and drainage, taking into account evolving needs, changing health risks and greater demand
  - Providing a safe water supply and sanitation and hand-washing facilities at schools and health posts
  - Supplying and upgrading sanitation facilities to include semi-permanent structures and household solutions, and providing basic family sanitation kits
  - Establishing regular hygiene-promotion activities
  - Planning for long-term solid waste disposal.

## **CHILD PROTECTION**

UNICEF commits to the protection of children and women from violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect, and in collaboration with partners will:

## **First six to eight weeks**

1. Conduct a rapid assessment of the situation of children and women. Within the appropriate mechanisms, monitor, advocate against, report and communicate on severe, systematic abuse, violence and exploitation.
2. Assist in preventing the separation of children from their caregivers, and facilitate the identification, registration and medical screening of separated children, particularly those under 5 years of age and adolescent girls.
3. Ensure that family-tracing systems are implemented with appropriate care and protection facilities.
4. Prevent sexual abuse and exploitation of children and women by:
  - (i) monitoring, reporting and advocating against instances of sexual violence by military forces, state actors, armed groups and others;
  - (ii) providing post-rape health and psychosocial care and support.

Internally, with regard to humanitarian workers and staff:

- (i) undertake and promote humanitarian activities in a manner that minimizes opportunities for sexual exploitation and abuse;

- (ii) have all UNICEF staff and partners sign the Code of Conduct and make them aware of appropriate mechanisms for reporting breaches of its six core principles.

## **Beyond initial response**

5. Within established mechanisms, support the establishment of initial monitoring systems, including on severe or systematic abuse, violence and exploitation.
6. In cases where children are separated, or at risk of being separated from caregivers, work directly or through partners to:
  - (i) assist in preventing the separation of children from their caregivers;
  - (ii) facilitate the identification, registration and medical screening of separated children, particularly those under five and adolescent girls;
  - (iii) facilitate the registration of all parents and caregivers who have lost their children;
  - (iv) provide support for the care and protection of separated children, including shelter;
  - (v) support partners involved in tracing and reunification, and provide tracing equipment, as required.
7. Provide support for the care and protection of orphans and other vulnerable children.

8. Support the establishment of safe environments for children and women, including child-friendly spaces, and integrate psychosocial support in education and protection responses.
9. In cases of armed conflict and in accordance with international legal standards, work directly or through partners to:
  - (i) monitor, report on and advocate against the recruitment and use of children in any capacity during armed conflicts;
  - (ii) seek commitments from parties to refrain from recruiting and using children;
  - (iii) negotiate the release of children who were recruited and introduce demobilization and reintegration programmes.
10. Within established mechanisms, monitor, report on, and advocate against the use of landmines and other indiscriminate weapons by both state and non-state actors. Coordinate mine-risk education.

## EDUCATION

To promote access to quality early learning and education for all children in affected communities, with a specific focus on girls, UNICEF, in collaboration with partners, will:

### **First six to eight weeks**

1. Set up temporary learning spaces with minimal infrastructure.

2. Resume schooling by reopening schools and starting the reintegration of teachers and children by providing teaching and learning materials and organizing semi-structured recreational activities.

### **Beyond initial response**

3. Re-establish and/or sustain primary education. Provide education and recreation kits and basic learning materials and teacher training.
4. Promote the resumption of quality educational activities in literacy, numeracy and life skills issues such as HIV/AIDS, prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, conflict resolution and hygiene.
5. Establish community services around schools (such as water supply and sanitation), where appropriate.

## HIV/AIDS

Taking into account the increased risk of HIV/AIDS infection in humanitarian situations, UNICEF, in collaboration with partners, will:

### **First six to eight weeks**

1. Provide post-rape-care kits, including post exposure prophylaxis for HIV where appropriate, to health centres.

### **Beyond initial response**

To promote access to information and basic care on HIV/AIDS for affected communities, especially children, young people and women, UNICEF, in collaboration with all relevant partners, will:

2. Inform young people about HIV transmission and prevention using the three primary prevention methods: Abstinence, Being faithful and using Condoms correctly and consistently. Inform young people on where to access basic health and counselling services, and collaborate with partners to facilitate young people's access to comprehensive HIV prevention services including treatment for sexually transmitted infections.
3. Provide health-care workers with training on post-rape health and psychosocial care.

# OPERATIONAL COMMITMENTS

## SECURITY

Within the inter-agency mechanism, address humanitarian needs while assuring safe access to affected populations and the safety and security of staff and assets.

### **First six to eight weeks**

1. Within the appropriate mechanisms, undertake a risk and threat assessment to determine the exact nature of the crisis, potential developments and implications for programme delivery.
2. Review the Minimum Operating Security Standards (MOSS) and update them, if necessary.
3. Drawing from the risk and threat assessment, identify implications for staff security and programme activities.
4. Undertake a rapid review of security preparedness in country and field offices, and provide appropriate guidance, resources and training.
5. Establish the exact whereabouts of all staff and determine whether they can operate safely in their present location or in proposed locations. Provide staff with the resources to do so

or temporarily relocate them until the proper conditions can be put in place.

6. Determine the security implications of deploying additional staff to the affected country/area.

### **Beyond initial response**

7. Continue to review security plans and MOSS requirements, including relocation, evacuation and safe haven alternatives, with country and regional offices.
8. Participate in inter-agency exercises to regularly update the risk and threat analysis, and establish appropriate analytical, long-term information requirements.
9. Provide additional resources, e.g., field security officers, financial support and training to staff, as required.
10. Regularly update the Security Plan based on risk and threat analysis and current and proposed programme activities.

## FUND-RAISING AND COMMUNICATION

To communicate on the situation and needs of children, and within the inter-agency framework, fund-raise for its programmes, UNICEF will:

### **First six to eight weeks**

1. Within 24-72 hours of an emergency, prepare a 'pitch document' on issues, action and impact, for sharing with government and National Committee donors. The document will later be revised based on assessments and participation in an inter-agency appeal process.
2. Communicate on the situation and needs of children through local and international media within the first 72 hours, as appropriate.
3. Prepare an emergency appeal in coordination with other UN agencies and another document, to be shared with donors, outlining UNICEF's portion of the inter-agency appeal.
4. Issue regular emergency donor updates.

### **Beyond initial response**

5. Based on a fund-raising and communication strategy, proactively engage with donors and media, both locally and

at headquarters, providing regular updates and visibility to UNICEF and its donors and partners.

6. Regularly communicate human interest stories for use by UNICEF National Committees.
7. Manage funds and report on contributions according to specified conditions and time frames.

## HUMAN RESOURCES

To ensure the timely deployment of experienced staff, UNICEF will:

### **First six to eight weeks**

1. Identify and deploy experienced staff through internal deployment, external recruitment and standby arrangements with partners.
  - Country offices to identify staffing needs drawing from the preparedness plan and management plan; regional offices and headquarters to provide support when required.

## **Beyond initial response**

2. Provide all staff with basic information and training on emergency preparedness and response, supported by pre-deployment orientation, ongoing training and learning initiatives and post-deployment debriefings.
3. Maintain and enhance UNICEF's policies for staff serving in emergency duty stations, while responding to operational needs and to the needs, safety and security of staff.
4. Provide all staff with information and support to address their well-being, including information on safety and security measures and procedures, HIV/AIDS, critical incidents and chronic work stress.
5. Ensure that staff conduct themselves at all times in a manner befitting their status as international civil servants and avoid any actions that may adversely reflect their integrity, independence and impartiality. In particular, provide staff members with the UN Rules governing behaviour related to sexual exploitation and abuse contained in the Secretary-General's Bulletin ST/SGB/2003/13 of 9 October 2003. In accordance with UN rules, implement a monitoring and complaints mechanism within the organization.

## INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS

To ensure the rapid establishment of appropriate information technology and telecommunications services in emergency areas, UNICEF will:

### **First six to eight weeks**

1. Provide security and telecommunications equipment and services required for programme implementation, in compliance with the Minimum Operating Security Standards.
2. Provide telecommunications support, such as flyaway Very Small Aperture Terminal (VSAT) and inter-agency shared connectivity, and maintain immediate response capacity through stockpile arrangements with equipment suppliers.
3. Implement core UNICEF information systems (e.g., the Programme Manager System (ProMS), Lotus Notes) with associated infrastructure in a timely manner.
4. Work within inter-agency forums to ensure opportunities are given for promoting the use of common systems.

## SUPPLY AND LOGISTICS

To ensure the availability of supplies and logistics for effective and timely fulfillment of the programme Core Commitments, and to strengthen existing supply and logistics capacities, UNICEF will:

### **First six to eight weeks**

1. Mobilize emergency supplies within 24 to 48 hours of an emergency, and assist in the development of a country plan.
2. Put in place procedures and directives for inter-country transfer and movement of supplies.
3. Maintain an operational supply network (i.e., the major procurement offices in UNICEF) with the authority to provide cross-border procurement.
4. Deploy staff for inter-agency rapid emergency assessment missions as required, and actively participate in common logistics efforts, e.g., with UN Joint Logistics Centre and others.
5. Deploy experienced in-country logistics staff as required.

### **Beyond initial response**

6. Maintain regional supply hubs to ensure continuous capacity to address the needs of a population of 420,000 at the onset of an emergency.

7. Institute long-term arrangements with suppliers for rapid replenishment of emergency supplies stored at the Copenhagen warehouse and at the regional emergency hubs.
8. Regularly update the cost estimate, by population size, of the 25 standard emergency items needed (including transportation costs) for the initial emergency response.

## **FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION**

To ensure the establishment of an efficient financial and administrative management structure, with regional office and headquarters support, for the effective implementation of programme and operational Core Commitments, within an environment of sound financial accountability, UNICEF will:

### **First six to eight weeks**

1. Assess financial and administrative capacity in country, including sources of cash, banking and financial systems, available funds disbursement methods and security of assets.
2. Through the use of standard checklists for funds management, provide guidance on funds management and disbursement modalities at the onset of the crisis.
3. Put in place internal oversight and control systems while

preserving the safety of staff members, partners and assets.

4. Respond rapidly to queries regarding finance and administration from field offices.

### **Beyond initial response**

5. Consult with country offices, regional offices, the Division of Human Resources and other stakeholders to deploy finance and administration staff to emergency duty stations, as required.

# ORGANIZATIONAL PREPAREDNESS AND SUPPORT

Implementation entails accountability for preparedness and support at all levels of the organization.

## COUNTRY OFFICE

1. Regularly update contingency and preparedness plans on the basis of a sound early warning analysis.
2. Achieve compliance with Minimum Operating Security Standards (MOSS).
3. Conduct rapid assessments (inter-agency or independently, as appropriate) to ensure that the country office can plan its response as well as report on the situation of children and women.
4. Implement the Initial Emergency Response Commitments.
5. Within 24 hours, prepare a supply plan and share it with the regional office and headquarters Supply Division, for their immediate action.
6. Provide information technology and telecommunications services for programme implementation, in compliance with MOSS.

7. Prepare a human resource plan and approach regional office and New York headquarters for deployment of additional staff, as required.
8. Identify financial resource requirements and utilize the options available within the organization to immediately allocate funds.
9. Within 24–72 hours, prepare a brief ‘pitch document’ outlining the issues, action and impact (not including a budget) for sharing with government and National Committee donors.
10. Within 1–2 weeks, release a Plan of Action, including a budget, for sharing with government and National Committee donors.
11. Within 1 month, prepare an emergency appeal in coordination with UNICEF’s Programme Funding Office and other UN agencies and be ready to provide proposals geared to specific donors, as required.
12. Within the first 72 hours, communicate on the situation and needs of children through local and international media, as appropriate.
13. Complete monitoring and evaluation in a timely manner.
14. Identify emergency learning needs, develop learning plans and ensure access for relevant staff to learning opportunities.

## REGIONAL OFFICE

1. Monitor country offices' continued early warning analysis, provide additional regional-level early warning analysis and provide a 'back-up' trigger for country office action on analysis, where necessary.
2. With the country office, identify where support is required in the areas of human, financial and supply/logistics resources, with clear terms of reference outlined for human resource deployment within 24 hours.
3. Make regional office staff available within 48 hours.
4. On the basis of the country office human resource plan, work with headquarters to identify staff, including initiating contact with neighbouring offices for additional staff support.
5. Provide information technology and telecommunications technical assistance.
6. Prepare regional supply standby arrangements and/or stockpiles of critical inputs for rapid deployment.
7. Provide programme oversight, guidance and support.
8. Approve the appeal and funding requests put forward by the country office, in consultation with headquarters.

9. In coordination with the country office and headquarters, advocate and report issues and developments, including funding needs, to the international community.
10. Provide stress management and counselling support to staff through regional mechanisms, as needed.
11. Support country offices in the identification of learning needs and the development of learning plans and provide learning opportunities.

## HEADQUARTERS

1. Trigger and identify situations to be treated as priority emergencies on the basis of early warning analysis.
2. In the event that country office resources are insufficient, identify options for providing additional financial resources within 24 hours of the request from the Executive Director or a Deputy Executive Director.
3. In consultation with country and regional office, expedite interim deployment of staff, including through identifying staff from other locations for immediate deployment, and global standby agreements with partners.
4. Designate a 'Crisis Manager' at headquarters as the primary focal point for communication with the country office and

regional office on the emergency response.

5. Prepare global supply standby arrangements and/or stockpiles for critical inputs so they are available for rapid deployment.
6. Provide information technology and telecommunications strategy, standards and technical architecture in close consultation with regional and country office.
7. Liaise and coordinate with other UN agencies involved in the emergency response, particularly the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, United Nations Joint Logistics Centre and United Nations Security Coordinator, on policy, security, logistics and resource mobilization.
8. Provide security tracking and backstopping.
9. Provide programme guidance and support, and approve the appeal in consultation with the regional office.
10. Initiate contact with the international media and donors within 72 hours, in collaboration with the respective country office and regional office.
11. Provide policy support, develop learning strategies and materials, organize global workshops (training of trainers) and provide guidance on emergency learning.

For more information contact  
the Office of Emergency Programmes,  
[emops@unicef.org](mailto:emops@unicef.org)

United Nations Children's Fund  
3 UN Plaza, New York, NY 10017, USA  
[pubdoc@unicef.org](mailto:pubdoc@unicef.org)  
[www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)

© The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), New York

ISBN: 92-806-3870-X

Revised March 2005