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# Recommendations for the 1<sup>st</sup> Global Ministerial Conference on Ending Violence Against Children

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At the [first ever Global Ministerial Conference on Ending Violence against Children](#) in November 2024, Governments from around the world will have an unprecedented opportunity to make commitments that drive progress towards ending violence against children. Global leaders will meet to “help secure a step-change in support for proven prevention solutions and reset collective ambitions to realize the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development target for every child to live free from violence.”

For [1 in 6 children](#), at least part of their childhood will be spent in conflict. These children, and the [millions of others](#) who have fled conflict or live in [other humanitarian crisis settings](#) face violence at home, in schools, in places of refuge, on the move, in their communities, and online.

**This Ministerial must include action for all children, including explicit commitments to the children who face the additional burdens of conflict and crisis.**

These commitments, in the form of concrete and quantifiable pledges during the Ministerial, must **support children** directly, **include those who care for children**, and ensure the creation of **safe environments where children can thrive**.

Achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16.2, which is dedicated to ending all forms of violence against children, is crucial not only for the well-being of children worldwide but also for the success of other interlinked SDGs, including, but not limited to, SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Inequality within and Among Countries) and SDG 10 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

Without purposefully including commitments to these children and their caregivers, the broader vision of the SDGs to create a more sustainable, peaceful, and prosperous world for all cannot be realized.

## Background

Childhood is the life-long foundation for every person who lives to adulthood. But not every childhood is safe and stable. For an estimated [1 in 2 children](#), childhood will be marked and marred by violence. Whether at home or at school, at the hands of a trusted caregiver or a stranger, violence in childhood has immediate, long-term, and [intergenerational implications](#) for individuals, communities, and societies at large. The places children should be most safe and secure - their homes and schools - are often where they see or experience violence themselves; [3 in 4 children](#) who experience violence do so at the hands of someone they know. The forms of Violence Against Children (VAC) are well known - sexual abuse, physical punishment, emotional abuse, neglect, and exploitation that may include trafficking of children, child recruitment into armed groups, and other forms of exploitative work benefiting adults at the expense of children's lives. With advancements in technology, [online VAC](#) has also become a major concern for the well-being and safety of children.

**“You can judge a society by the way it treats its children.”**  
**- Nelson Mandela**

In humanitarian crises, including those caused by the climate crisis, challenges and vulnerabilities are amplified to the point that the very right to life is at stake. In these contexts, livelihoods are threatened, food insecurity intensifies, access to essential services is limited, people are on the run for safety, and government services are stretched. These circumstances expose children to witness and directly experience different forms of maltreatment; they are at risk of harsh treatment and exploitation and exposed to death, injuries, and illness, resulting in psychological distress, anxiety, depression, and risk of life-long trauma. Intersecting vulnerabilities linked to age, gender, and disability, among other factors, can further increase risk for children living in humanitarian crises. Children, who [represent 41% of all forcibly displaced people](#) though they only constitute 30% of the world's population, bear a significant brunt of the impact of crisis.

At the same time, caregivers of children are also [deeply impacted by conflict and crisis](#). These caregivers – the majority of whom are women and girls – include parents, grandparents, older siblings and require support to meet their own needs and to ensure they can provide safe environments for children. Despite this, the solutions geared toward families often lack holistic support for their specific vulnerabilities, limiting caregivers' abilities to provide children with the nurturing care they need to thrive.

Setting a safe and violence free childhood is foundational for children themselves to develop, thrive, and realize their full potential; it also helps to ensure that they do not resort to violence themselves as adults. Safe childhoods are also a prerequisite of building stronger societies at large. The costs of not preventing violence are staggering; economically, VAC's economic burden to society could be as high as [8% of global GDP](#). Despite programs to prevent VAC showing [high return on investment](#), [only one in four](#) countries that have a national action plan to prevent VAC fund those plans fully. In humanitarian contexts specifically, the funding gap for child protection in humanitarian contexts has been rising in recent years; half-way through 2024, the funding gap for Child Protection stands at [78.8%](#) according to the Financial Tracking Service.

To support children and caregivers, **States must sign, ratify, and further domesticate relevant international child rights instruments and endorse relevant principles to ensure the protection of children from violence in all settings, including during humanitarian crisis. They must also build adequate social welfare and justice systems and institute accountability systems for children's safety and welfare. Doing so across all settings – before, during and after crises - must be a priority of the 1<sup>st</sup> Global Ministerial Conference on Ending Violence Against Children.**

# Recommendations

To put forward commitments that will create sustainable and catalytic change in ending VAC, the IRC recommends that States base pledges within the following principles:

- a. **Explicitly include children and caregivers living in displacement** – including as refugees or asylum seekers – within commitments/pledges. This should include commitments/pledges towards both domestic and foreign policy and aid and should aim to ensure that all children have equitable access to basic and protective services.
- b. **Include all core Ministries which ensure children’s safety** (e.g. protection, education, health, etc.) in pledging discussions and commit to ensuring that this collaboration lives beyond the life of the Ministerial.
- c. Review and **localize the below recommendations** with the **input and assistance of national and local civil society organizations**, including those with expertise in humanitarian response, to ensure specificity and applicability to various contexts.

Beyond utilizing the above principles, the **International Rescue Committee calls on States to make pledges across 4 key areas:**



## 1. Ensure Equitable Access of Refugee and Displaced Children to National Child Protection Systems and Strengthen Social Services

Refugee and displaced children, particularly those displaced at a younger age or born in displacement, may end up living their entire childhoods in displacement, deeply impacting their entire futures. This is true today of an [estimated 47.2 million children](#) living in displacement, including 28.6 million displaced within their own countries. These children are likely to experience displacement multiple times and may seek safety and asylum with no identified legal status or legal documentation due to not being able to register their births or due to difficulty in navigating asylum systems that are not child friendly. In locations hosting concentrated number of refugees or internally displaced persons (IDPs), national and local services are often stretched, leaving these children unable to enjoy their rights.

States have a responsibility to the children living within their jurisdiction, regardless of their legal status.

We call on States to commit to **including refugee and displaced children in National and Sub-national Social Welfare and Child Protection Systems by:**

- Ensuring – and increasing - **adequate resource allocations** towards these systems to guarantee children’s rights to survival, development, protection, and participation, with specific emphasis on protecting them from any potential abuse and violence.
- Committing to adequate and sustainable resourcing of the policies, systems, and programs necessary to identify, care for, refer, and support caregivers and children at risk or who have experienced VAC at national and subnational levels; this should include the regular collection of data and evidence on VAC (such as through VAC Surveys with a crisis lens) to allow for evidence-based policy-making and program design and implementation.
- Holistically considering social welfare and protection services (such as social protection services, health, and child-friendly justice systems) that should **cater to displaced children** as part of national systems.
- Ensuring that national development plans, preparedness plans, and contingency finance, which allow for service continuity and/or alternative provisions in the event of crisis, bring together all core sectors and build upon Ministerial commitments/pledges and learnings.
- Recognizing the **protective nature of education** and ensuring that education systems safely and equitably include displaced and refugee children.
- Integrating refugee children into communities and ending encampment policies.





## 2. Supporting Parents and Caregivers

The lives of children are inextricably linked to the lives, decisions, and behaviors of those who care for them. In fact, a primary protective factor across all contexts is caregiving that positively supports the growth, development, safety, and well-being of children. In humanitarian crises, which are known to both introduce and exacerbate existing risk factors for children, caregivers are experiencing trauma themselves, eroding an important protective factor that could potentially prevent or mitigate harm to children. However, with appropriate support to ensure the children in their care are safe, caregivers can provide a first line of defense. This makes the household a particularly important [entry point](#) to disrupt violence, in both the physical and digital realms. In terms of both mediating risk and promoting resilience, the central role of parents and caregivers is clear: **supporting caregivers during humanitarian crises means protecting children from harm.**

We call on States to commit to **supporting parents and caregivers by:**

- Supporting child protection services that recognize the responsibilities of caregivers by **increasing resource allocations for quality caregiving interventions** that work to ensure child protection outcomes.
- Enhancing training of social workers to address the gendered dimensions of caregiver needs and responsibilities.
- Committing to champion the cause of caregiving of children in humanitarian settings and increase public awareness and legitimacy for child protection and child and caregiver well-being.
- Investing in **scalable evidence-based interventions** to promote child protection through caregiver support.
- **Revising national laws, policies, and systems to promote caregiving environments** that holistically address the unique needs of both children and caregivers in humanitarian crises.



## 3. Creating Safe and Enabling School Environments

Education can play a strong protective role, but all too often, children cannot access education in a crisis – or are at risk of violence if they can. An estimated [246 million children](#) experience school violence every year, and [girls and gender non-conforming people](#) are disproportionately affected. In conflict zones and areas affected by natural disasters or climate events, schools often become targets, with [thousands of attacks](#) reported in recent years that lead to physical and psychological trauma for children. The breakdown of social structures and displacement further expose children to abuse and exploitation. Ensuring safe educational environments is critical for protection, **well-being, and learning of children**, and requires coordinated international efforts.

We call on States to commit to **creating safe school environments by:**

- **Accelerating the achievement of the vision outlined in the [Safe School Declaration](#) (and where necessary endorsing the Declaration) and implementation of the Safe School Declaration Guidelines.** This includes, but is not limited to:
  - o Developing a system to prevent school-related violence through stronger safeguards, early warning, and safety planning.
  - o Developing response plans to violence that are based on quantitative and qualitative data, prioritizing the most at risk, and allowing children to continue to learn even when a crisis occurs.
  - o Invest in tactics to ensure safe learning without interruption, which can include alternative, innovative, accelerated, and flexible learning solutions for educational continuity, as well as anticipatory action.
- **Enhancing continuing professional development** so school personnel can create protective learning environments in which all students are safe and able to learn.
- **Ensuring targeted psychosocial support** to children, their teachers, and caregivers to ensure safe learning environments, including but not limited to when schools have faced attack.



#### 4. Combating the Recruitment/Use of Children by Armed Groups and Child Detention

UN Security Council reports consistently highlight the recruitment and use of children by armed forces and armed groups as one of the top two most commonly reported and verified cases of grave violations against children. Between 2005 and 2022, [more than 105,000 children](#) were verified as recruited and used by parties to conflict, although the actual number of cases is believed to be much higher. Armed forces and groups exploit children, subjecting them to violence, coercion, and indoctrination. On their release from armed groups, these children, many who were recruited as young as 8 years old, are at risk of detention, often under harsh conditions and without due process. The stigma they face from community, as well as the lack of reintegration support to rebuild their lives after release from armed groups, compounds their trauma and disrupts their development.

When families face extreme poverty and loss of livelihoods, children are put at risk of trafficking in labor and hazardous labor, particularly in humanitarian crisis; these are also push factors for recruitment of children by armed forces or groups. The true scale of the issue of child recruitment, trafficking of children resulting in detention, and the impact of adversity on children is not known due to limited population-based VAC studies and systematic monitoring data to inform policy solutions for children. This lack of policy is one further element that traps children and adults in cycles of hardship and violence.

We call on States to commit to combatting child recruitment and ending all Grave Violations against children by:

- **Endorsing and resourcing the implementation of the [Paris Principles](#)**, including by:
  - o Putting in place strong systems to stop the recruitment of children into armed forces and groups.
  - o Reviewing and revising policies that guarantee national and sub-national monitoring and response mechanisms, accountability mechanisms, and community-based protection systems (including for the reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces or groups).
  - o Reviewing justice systems to recognize children as rights holders, and to treat children as children first, with their best interests central to any decision that impacts their lives. In line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, detention should be the last resort.
- Recognizing the need for gender-relevant interventions that meet the [specific needs of girls](#) associated with armed forces and groups.
- Documenting and putting in place [services that support children maimed and injured](#) as a result of armed conflict.
- **Signing and implementing measures in the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children**, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.
- Reviewing reservations to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its optional protocols and retracting those contrary to the full attainment of or limiting access to rights.

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The International Rescue Committee (IRC) helps people whose lives have been shattered by conflict and disaster to survive, recover and rebuild. Founded in 1933 at the call of Albert Einstein, we now work in over 40 crisis-affected countries as well as communities throughout Europe and the Americas.

Ingenuity, fortitude and optimism remain at the heart of who we are. We deliver lasting impact by providing health care, helping children learn, and empowering individuals and communities to become self-reliant, always with a focus on the unique needs of women and girls.