

# RISK 3

## CHILD AND FORCED FAMILY SEPARATION



### WHAT ACTS OR SITUATIONS CONSTITUTE THE PRESENCE OF THE RISK?

This protection risk includes all situations when family members are separated, including girls and boys from their parents and caregivers, because of violent conflicts, climate induced disasters and other crises. Some children, persons with disabilities or older persons are separated from their families during the chaos of a humanitarian emergency. Others may be pulled away by parties involved in a violent conflict. Poor living conditions, threats of violence and the disruption of traditional social protection mechanisms may force parents to plan the separation from their children as a negative coping strategy, which puts these unaccompanied or separated persons at a high risk of violence, abuse, and exploitation. Separated children are those separated from both parents or their primary caregiver but not necessarily from other relatives; unaccompanied children are those separated from both parents, primary caregivers and other relatives, and are not under the care of an adult who, by law or custom is responsible for doing so. Family members may be separated for hours, days, months – even years. Those who receive early support in tracing their relatives are more likely to be reunified faster.



### WHAT FACTORS MUST BE IDENTIFIED FOR MONITORING?

The monitoring of this protection risk must be undertaken in all situations, and especially in situations of mass population movements. According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, when a child is temporarily or permanently deprived of its family environment, State Parties must provide protection, assistance and alternative care arrangements. These must also facilitate and support family tracing activities, especially for unaccompanied and separated children. Moreover, in situation of armed conflicts, family reunification is a right under international law. Forced separation disrupts the parent-child relationship and might expose them to various dangers and heightened risks of exploitation, neglect and abuse. Children might also suffer psychosocial distress with short- and long-term consequences for their development and their social and emotional wellbeing. Persons with disabilities or older persons are also at heightened risk of neglect when separated from their families and caregivers. Restoring family links and reuniting families when possible is essential. In addition to preventing protection/child protection and/or GBV incidents, family reunification restores people’s dignity, feelings of safety, and mitigates the impact of the crisis on their physical and mental wellbeing, which is of paramount importance for preserving or building resilience to future shocks.



### WHAT INFORMATION & DATA CAN ILLUSTRATE THE PRESENCE OF THE RISK?

Data and information to identify and monitor this protection risk may be obtained from a number of sources. The core information relates to identifying how many children are unaccompanied or separated, and how many cases of family separation there are. Partners, Child Protection AoRs and other specialized actors may have implemented registration exercises in which every person/family is interviewed by trained protection/child protection specialists, such as in a refugee or IDP registration exercise. This data is fundamental for the analysis, with the due consideration of never publishing the number of unaccompanied or separated children per location. If registration data on the exact number of separated families and unaccompanied children does not exist, the following sources may be used to understand the degree of presence and impact of this protection risk: ongoing KII assessments that can generally indicate the presence of unaccompanied or separated children; HH surveys indicating separated family members; specialized FGDs or expert interviews that can provide valuable information on the underlying drivers and locations that are leading to family separation; specialized helplines or country databases; ICRC and National Societies’ Family Links Programs; Organization of Persons with Disabilities assessments or studies and assessment on persons with disabilities and older persons in humanitarian crisis. Research papers and other studies/assessments in locations with recurring/cyclical disasters, can support the identification of drivers and impact of family separation based on knowledge of previous similar emergencies.

