

Working with children

Every child has the right to a normal childhood

Child rights

- Although children have the same rights as adults they are especially vulnerable to abuse and often require **special protection**.
- The CRC defines children as boys and girls under 18 years of old. Their rights are set out in the CRC and include rights to **adequate food, water, shelter, and education opportunities**.
- **Access to education** is critical in emergencies to restore a sense of normality, enable children to express their feelings, offer the protection of responsible adults and reduce risk of exploitation.
- Children should also be given the chance to **play and grow up in a safe and supportive environment**.

Exploitation and abuse

- Emergencies increase the risk of abuse as children become separated from their families, suffer the effects of reduced household income, disrupted education and restricted freedom.
- Separated children should be cared for in the community rather than in residential care where risks of abuse are greater. NGOs can cause separation by offering better care than families can manage.
- Abuse occurs due to lack of care or protection by adults, poverty, poor access to education, cultural norms and beliefs.
- Abuse may be sexual, physical or emotional and include child labour, sexual abuse or violence.
- Exploitation and abuse has a devastating, long term effect on children including physical harm, emotional trauma and social rejection.
- Governments, NGOs and the UN have a duty to protect children including mitigating the risk of abuse from their own staff i.e. humanitarian workers, peace-keepers and teachers.
- Children's vulnerability varies with age, gender, and disability.
- Child labour is a common form of exploitation with girls forced into domestic service and boys into hard physical labour.

Children and conflict

- In conflict situations children may become the unwitting observers, perpetrators or victims of atrocities.
- Unaccompanied children are at high risk of abduction or forced recruitment as child soldiers. Those who experience combat suffer deep emotional, physical and psychological trauma.
- Reuniting former child soldiers with their families and reintegrating them in society is important for recovery and rebuilding of communities.



The 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

Was created to ensure protection for children

Has been endorsed by almost every country in the world.

The CRC is guided by four basic principles:

- **Best interests of children should come first and before political or commercial concerns.**
- **Children have the right to *participate* in decisions that affect them.**
- **All children have the right to *survival and to development*.**
- **All children have *equal rights*, regardless of age, sex, ethnicity, class, religion etc.**

All In Diary CD Resources:

© ICRC (2003) Child Soldiers
 © UNHCR (2006) A Protection Induction Programme
 © Save The Children – Protecting children in emergencies in Nigeria

Web links for further information

www.savethechildren.org
<http://www.unicef.org/publications/index.html>
<http://www.unicef.org/crc/>