



IRC in Afghanistan: Overview of the Child and Youth Protection and Development Program - CYPD

Children in Afghanistan

The humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan has deteriorated rapidly after the takeover of the Taliban on Aug '21. The unrest created massive displacement and disruption to the main public services. This coupled with the existing humanitarian needs due to conflict and drought, created a myriad of needs across the country. The IRC suspended some of the interventions including child protection programs. Most of the de facto authorities are unfamiliar with humanitarian activities and the lack of coordination between central and provincial administrations has also directly caused interruptions on field level implementation. Project registration and resumption of CP interventions has proven to be difficult in light of Taliban activities.

Half of Afghanistan's population of around 30 million people comprises of young people under the age of 18 years old. This young population is exposed to extreme situations of violence and abuse due to decades of violence and natural disasters that have plagued the country and has affected the country's economy negatively. The increased number and frequency of conflict-related incidents has caused an alarming rise in children casualties.

Other risk factors compounding an already dire situation are the harmful social norms, practices and traditions affecting children. Afghan girls are at the risk of early marriage, honor killings, domestic abuse, and sexual violence. Afghan boys on the other hand, in addition to the heightened risk of abuse and violence are at the risk of being recruited into armed conflict. In addition to the above, children of both genders are exposed to hazardous labour practices, contact with landmines, and violence at home.

IRC in Afghanistan

The IRC child protection programs aims to protect children from various forms of violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect, abuse through :

- personalized support for children according to their protection needs
- Contributing to the realization of their rights so that they are safe in their living environments.
- changing social norms of the community.

IRC's child protection program focuses on four outcome areas:

- preventing violence and improving the safety of children in environments such as the home and community,
- family strengthening, including the socio-economic reintegration of children into families and communities and the prevention of child recruitment,
- the protection of children in schools, and
- protection of children in emergencies (e.g., conflict, epidemics).

In all of these areas, IRC program interventions focus on **responding to harm**, for example, through case

Afghanistan Context

Afghanistan is in a protracted emergency resulting in over 50% of children in need of humanitarian assistance and 8% with severe disability. An assessment of Afghanistan humanitarian needs estimates thousands of people are internally displaced, thousands more are cross- borders returnees and affected by natural disasters.

Children are among the most vulnerable and are significantly impacted by conflict and displacement. Generally, children are vulnerable to forced labor, human trafficking, early marriage, and sexual exploitation, issues that have been exacerbated by political and economic changes in the country. Child protection concerns are high, particularly for unaccompanied and separated children (UASC). These children are at more risk of experiencing abuse and exploitation, and being recruited into armed groups.

Children's access to education has also been threatened by a combination of conflict, natural disaster, COVID-19, and the economic decline witnessed in the country. Consequences of these has been the near-collapse of the formal schooling system coupled with possible bans against education for older girls.

management, as well as using an integrated, family and community-based approach **to prevent** and respond to harm when it occurs, case in point being safe healing and learning spaces, parenting interventions, and community-based child protection work.

The IRC's Child Protection (CP) program in Afghan provides at-risk children and families in need with specialized emergency CP services through using both child centered and community strengthening approaches. These programs include **Safe Healing and Learning Spaces (SHLS)**, **Child protection Case management and parenting intervention like positive parentings skills session (FMD)**.

Safe Healing and Learning Spaces (SHLS)

Given the context of the country, SHLS programs are essential to improve the psychosocial wellbeing of returnees and conflict affected children. The SHLS is not a formal education center, but rather provides a basic level of education in reading, math and social-emotional learning. When required, IRC provides referrals to formal and community-based education.

Community-Based Education {CBE} is outreach education into underserved areas that is part of the formal education system in Afghanistan. CBE is primarily made up of the delivery of Community-Based Classes {CBC} and Accelerated Learning Programs {ALP}. Community-based schools are led

and managed by educators, parents or other leaders, and classes take place in a community space or home.

Most of the SHLS children are affiliated with IDPs and Returnees' Families, hence the SHLS facilitators and CP caseworkers refer them to formal schools and community-based education center if available in locations. The SHLS facilitators are recruited based on their previous experience working with children and/or in educational settings.

Children make up approximately half of Afghanistan's population. Due to persistent war, displacement, a poor economy, and destructive social norms and behaviors, children are exposed to extreme conditions of violence and abuse. Child casualties have grown dramatically as the number and frequency of conflict-related occurrences have increased. IRC has been a leader and continues to drive good practise in working with children through areas such as [Safe Healing and Learning Spaces](#) including [Social Emotional Learning](#), Families make a difference ([Parenting Interventions](#) and [Case management](#)). Currently, a total of 36 SHLS centers are functional and 6480, (3240 boys and 3240 girls) children are enrolled and attending Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) sessions across targeted province. (Herat, Nangarhar, Laghman, Badghis, Helmand and Khost).

Locations of SHLSs have been decided in consultation with the community, including children, adolescents, and families and based on meaningful access, including for children and family members with disabilities. SHLSs are implemented in rented spaces that are both safe for children and families at risk and designed to be child friendly.

SHLS benefit vulnerable boys and girls between the age of 6-11, such as children engaged in child labour, unaccompanied and separated children, out of school children, girls at risk of early marriage, and children at risk of, or who have experienced, abuse or neglect. These spaces provide a safe, predictable environment where they can interact with other children, improve basic reading and math skills, play, build social and emotional skills, and be supported by a trusted adult when they experience harm.

Children identified with continued pattern of distress given the stressors they are subjected to by any prevailing conditions are integrated within new cohorts for SEL sessions. Children with special needs and their parents are also purposely targeted and supported.

Parenting Interventions

To support families to prevent and respond to child protection violations, IRC implements parenting interventions in the country. Evidence has shown that parenting interventions can reduce violence against children and improve parent-child relationship using strategies to provide psychosocial support to children.

IRC organizes and implements gender-disaggregated FMD parenting skills training focused on positive discipline to reduce harsh or violent practices, encourage empathetic communication to improve parent-child interaction, and support children's cognitive SEL. IRC has implemented the FMD parenting skills program in all targeted SHLSs to promote positive parenting practices, provide caregivers with skills to manage stress, and provide techniques for caregivers to support their child and adolescent's psychosocial wellbeing. In the past 6 months, a total of 2400 parents have been enrolled and are attending the sessions.

Case Management

The IRC engages in the Child Protection Area of Responsibility (CPAoR) at the country level. It is co-chairing

the Child Protection Case Management Task Force (CMTF) at Kabul.

Through specialized CP case management services, IRC identifies vulnerable children and provides immediate support to address their needs. Case management services are provided for children that are at risk of or have experienced family separation, violence, abuse, neglect and/or exploitation through IRC's gender-balanced team of caseworkers. The CP Caseworkers use the SHLS as a confidential location for the provision of individual support services.

The CP Caseworkers are also provided with a five-day child protection case management foundational training, five-day training on Caring for Child Survivors (CCS), and other specialized training. Through a trained CP caseworker (two per SHLS center), the IRC has provided protection case management services in the past six months to 302 (139 females, 163 male) with specific protection concerns, including clients at heightened risk due to substance abuse, persons with disabilities, and persons experiencing psychosocial distress, among others.

Community Engagement

Community-based committees (CBC) remained integral to IRC's programming approach, with ongoing engagement and support to SHLS centers in each target location. In total 36 CBCs are functional under the CP program in Afghanistan now. Each CBC holds monthly meetings where they plan and implement community-led strategies to prevent or reduce protection risks, as well as mitigate and address the root causes and consequences of violence, coercion, and deprivation in their respective communities.

Each CBC comprises of a maximum of 20 members (10 male and 10 female). IRC supports CBCs in conducting a community risk profile, where protection risks to different groups in the community are identified. Using the findings, communities selected one barrier to access services or child protection risk to be addressed by IRC child protection team with technical and in-kind assistance.



IRC's global child protection programs aim to ensure that children are safe, able to exercise their rights, and cared for, in a family or family-like environment that promotes their physical, social, emotional, cognitive and economic well-being. For more information on IRC's global child protection work, visit <https://childprotectionpractitioners.org>