

COUNTRY CONTEXT

Ethiopia continues to face compounded humanitarian challenges caused by extended drought and its consequences. On the other hand, the impact of conflicts in Northern Ethiopia and some pockets in the country require continued responsive measures. Flooding has become a seasonal phenomenon that destroys all the assets at the family and community level. Concomitantly, the impact of the global economic crisis is affecting Ethiopia with inflation, spike in the prices of essential commodities including food and fuel, and limited availability of supplies in the affected areas (Ethiopia humanitarian response plan, 2023). In Ethiopia, 31.4 million people, including 16.5 million children, 7.8 million women and 5.7 million people with disabilities are suffering due to multiple, overlapping hazards: armed conflict, severe drought, flooding, intercommunal violence, and outbreaks of disease. (Humanitarian action for children, UNICEF, 2023). These crises have also compounded pre-existing gender inequalities, exclusion and risks for women and girls. Primary and secondary displacements and related needs of at least 4.5 million internally displaced people continue to grow, while the situation of 875,879 refugees is also highly affected by the current crises. Social services and accountability mechanisms that are critical to the protection of children have broken down or been weakened due to insecurity and instability. In northern Ethiopia due to armed conflict induced humanitarian crises, there is a significant protection concerns, children are exposed to various forms of violence and separation of families is prevalent. In the southern and eastern regions of the country, due to draught, families have been forced to migrate in search of food and pasture, forcing children to drop out of school and increasingly face child marriage as the only prospect for a family's survival (Humanitarian action for children, UNICEF, 2023).

Program Implementation & Partnership

The IRC implements its child protection projects in coordination with Refugee and Returnee service (RRS) in refugee and Bureau of women and children affair/ BWCA in IDP context. The IRC empowers local government partners through provision of training in protraction concepts and ensures their engagement throughout project implementation. BWCA provides case management service to vulnerable children including unaccompanied and separated children. IRC supports with facilitation of capacity building training, coaching, and mentoring.

The IRC also closely works with local community-based structures including child protection committee, child right clubs, and community care coalition. The IRC empowers the community-based structures through training and ensures their engagement throughout project implementation. The CPC and CRC engage in community awareness raising activities and identification and referral of child protection cases. The IRC participates in coordination meetings including protection cluster and CP- GBV AOR at a national and local level. The IRC works in partnership with humanitarian organizations to address protection concerns and conducts joint mass awareness campaigns.



Learn more at:

1. <https://shls.rescue.org/shls-toolkit/parenting-skills>
2. <https://www.rescue.org/resource/supporting-adolescents-and-their-families-emergencies-safe-project-brief>
3. <https://shls.rescue.org/shls-toolkit/social-emotional-learning>
4. <https://www.rescue.org/resource/safe-healing-and-learning-spaces-toolkit>
5. www.unicef.org/appeals/ethiopia

CHILD PROTECTION PROGRAM PRIORITIES IN ETHIOPIA

Child protection programs are implemented in 3 refugee camps in Somali region and in 413 IDP sites: (12) in Oromia and (1) in Somali Regions in Ethiopia. Across all its operational areas, the IRC responds directly to children who have been affected by the devastating effects of humanitarian emergencies, provides support to all refugee and internally displaced vulnerable children and their caregivers. It focuses on the protection of boys and girls below the age of 18 from abuse, neglect, violence, exploitation, and harmful practices and responds when children experience or are at risk of harm. In Ethiopia, assessments have revealed a high prevalence of child abuse and neglect in refugee camps and IDP sites, including child labor and harmful traditional practices, such as child marriage, as well as a high incidence of unaccompanied and separated children (UASC). In response, the IRC strengthens the community capacity to ensure the protection of children who have experienced family separation, abuse, exploitation, violence, as well as prevent and mitigate other child protection risks.

Community Engagement and Local Child Protection Actors

IRC's community-based prevention and response program works with children, community, and local government structures in the refugee camps and IDP sites, providing services for children at risk. IRC Child Protection staff works with the Woreda Office of Women, Children and Youth Affairs (WOWCYA), community-based child protection structures, such as child protection committees; community leaders /religious leaders, child right clubs and other service providers such as school communities, health staff, law enforcement bodies of the woredas, to support and strengthen their knowledge of child protection concerns and be able to identify and refer at risk children to appropriate services. These key community groups are influential in the efforts to stop child marriage, child labor, trafficking, and family separation within their communities. Together with local government bodies. These community structures are also instrumental in forming a kinship care arrangement and other alternative care arrangements. The IRC has put in place accessible, responsive, and confidential feedback and reporting mechanisms such as suggestion boxes, office walk-in hours for children and families to improve child protection services.

Case Management

The IRC currently provides individual case management to 567 (283F, 284M) children and their families in Aw Barre, Kebri Beyah and Sheder refugee camps in Somali region and 56 (30G, 26B) internally displaced children in East Hararghe, Oromia region. 93 Child Protection Social Workers support children and their families with individual case management services, SHLS based activities, and community outreach. The IRC trained its child protection staff, including 93 community based social workers, on case management and how to provide this service in a systematic and timely manner through direct support and/or referrals to other services available in the area. The IRC identifies vulnerable children according to prioritization criteria agreed with the community and registers them in a confidential child protection information management system (CPIMS) database. If needed, these children and their families can be referred to other services available in the camps and IDP sites and IRC ensures that referral pathways are in place and accessible for boys and girls who are abused, neglected, exploited.

Psychosocial Support

The IRC, through the establishment of more than 10 Safe Healing and Learning Spaces (SHLS), currently addresses the psychosocial distress faced by refugee and internally displaced children, as well as their caregivers. SHLS activities promote children's well-being and resilience; by providing a set of structured, culturally, and age-appropriate activities, such as Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), indoor and outdoor recreational activities. In the SHLS, trained facilitators provide psychosocial support, educational and recreational activities, such as SEL, drawing, staging of drama, music, and storytelling activities, that create a sense of normalcy for 8147 (2,219F,5,928M) in Somali and 1,192 (562F,630M) children. The IRC also holds child-to-child discussions in the SHLS where children, supported by SHLS facilitators, identify and cope with challenges in their lives, learn to analyze the causes and consequences of such challenges, make positive decisions, and bring about behavioral change within the community and among their peers.

Awareness-raising

To ensure the creation of a safe and caring environment for children, the IRC aims to build the knowledge of the community on child protection concerns and mitigation strategies through community education and mass awareness campaigns. Along with community-based structures including child protection committees (CPC) and child rights clubs (CRC), the IRC raises awareness on harmful traditional practices such as child marriage, child labour, and the devastating effects they have on the life of children including trafficking. IRC also uses the celebration of international days, such as the African Child Day, Universal Child Rights Day, and International Child Labor Day, as entry points to reach the wider community with pertinent child protection messages.

Parenting Skills Interventions and Capacity Building

The IRC Child Protection programs use the parenting skills intervention curriculum to promote the well-being of children and adolescents through improving parents' stress-management skills, positive parenting practices, and strategies for supporting children and adolescents with psychosocial needs. A total of 214 (121F,93M) in Oromia and 513 (386 F, 127M) in Somali trained on positive parenting skills. It is focused on preventing and decreasing violence against children in the home and improving positive developmental outcomes for children in conflict and displacement settings, with a particular attention in investing in young children. The IRC targets parents and caregivers (both male and female) in refugee camps and IDP sites and provides them with 12 structured sessions on stress, coping strategies, and positive discipline methods according to the different ages of the child. The IRC parenting programs foster a caring and nurturing family environment, where children can grow healthy and have a positive relationship with their caregivers.