Keeping Children Safe calls on the UN to adopt and promote child safeguarding measures in an emergency response.

Keeping Children Safe calls upon the UN, as the world leaders in response to emergencies, to set an example and recognise that the risks to children are not just from sexual abuse by humanitarian workers but all forms of child abuse both directly from the field staff and also from the nature of the design of response programs. Child safeguarding is an organisation's responsibility to do no harm through staff, projects and organisational operations.

Currently organisations are focused on preventing sexual abuse and exploitation (PSEA) of vulnerable adults and children by humanitarian workers. This focus has been the result of the UN Secretary- General's Bulletin: Special Measures for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse (ST/SGB/2003/13), with the UN leading the sector on this and efforts by standards organisations such as HAP and Interaction to help organisations meet these responsibilities. Child safeguarding[1], however, is broader than PSEA and requires organisations to ensure programmes are well designed and implemented – this is currently a significant gap. As key organisations in emergency response UN organisations could lead the field in ensuring child safeguarding measures are in place.

Current good practice following an emergency includes:

- The introduction of protection officers, regularly discussing issues of protection with communities[2]

- Establishing an appropriate complaints mechanisms[3] backed up by strong referral mechanisms

- Creating awareness with children - networks of children's organisations and peer support in raising concerns about abuse[4].

There are still challenges to implementing safeguarding following an emergency such as:

- Lack of awareness and understanding of the risks to children, little consideration of the possible negative effects on children when programmes are designed
  - Cash for work schemes can become vehicles for exploitation where camp committees are responsible for drawing up lists
  - Conditions in camps e.g. location of toilets etc. can contribute to sexual abuse of children[5]

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[1] Child safeguarding is an organisations role in ensuring that its staff and its projects do not expose children to risks of all forms of abuse. (July 2012) Keeping Children Safe www.keepingchildrensafe.org.uk/news/role-safeguarding-child-protection-systems-your-house-order
[2] Change starts with us, talk to us! (2010) HAP www.hapinternational.org/pool/files/change-starts-with-us.pdf
[3] Guide for setting-up Child Friendly Complaints and Response Mechanisms (July 2011) Save the Children www.hapinternational.org/pool/files/guide-to-a-child-friendly-crm-lessons-from-dadaab-kenya-final-draft.pdf
[4] Hart, J (2004) Children's Participation in Humanitarian Action: learning from zones of armed conflict, University of Oxford supported by CIDA
[5] Change starts with us, talk to us! (2010) HAP www.hapinternational.org/pool/files/change-starts-with-us.pdf

- Inappropriate use of media communications e.g. depictions of children as helpless victims or images used without the consent of the children and their care-givers

- Lack of a pre-existing child safeguarding system in countries prior to the emergency - emergency responses are time pressured and it is harder to have a well-functioning system if one didn't exist before an emergency.

- A lack of coordination between actors on the ground.

The following actions are needed:

- Child safeguarding should form part of the initial briefing for staff upon arrival in country

- All staff, both rota and Head Office or Regional Office should have undertaken child safeguarding training

- All child safeguarding needs and risk assessment are included in the project design, implementation, monitoring and review

- Ensure that children are consulted and participate in decision making about programming so they can identify risk factors

- Ensure that children have information about acceptable and unacceptable behaviour from adults and other children and know how to report any concerns

- Ensure that children are involved in identifying safe ways to raise concerns

- Ensure that a focal point is identified in the community and within an agency to ensure rapid response when there is concern raised

- Safeguarding to be clearly stated as area of responsibility of senior management

- Cluster arrangements need to include safeguarding

- Establish child safeguarding systems in all countries before emergencies strike This should be reflected in emergency preparedness planning and budgets to give it the priority it needs.

- There is a need for open and transparent reporting of cases to build trust and understanding that this is happening and learn ways to reduce the risks.

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Over the last few years Keeping Children Safe has worked with many of those involved in emergency responses - members of the Child Protection Working Group, staff from 83 different relief organisations and it's own members including Save the Children, World Vision, War Child and Plan to devise a set of six minimum standards for child safeguarding in emergencies. If put in place agencies will be doing all they can to prevent the risk of abuse to children. These standards can be found in Keeping Children Safe – an emergency pocket guide.
http://www.keepingchildrensafe.org.uk/emergencies-toolkit