Terre des Hommes Netherlands

Humanitarian Action

Thematic Programme

Every year, events such as armed conflicts and climate-related and socio-natural disasters trigger humanitarian crises in different parts of the world, significantly increasing children's vulnerability to exploitation. Approximately 300 million (or 1 in 29 people worldwide) currently need humanitarian assistance.[1]

The Challenge: Facts & Figures

300 million
(1 in 29 people worldwide) need humanitarian assistance. Children make up around half of the population needing humanitarian assistance.

1 billion
children live in areas with extremely high risk for climate-related impacts.

The risk of child labour for children who live in countries in fragile and conflict-affected situations is three times higher than the global average.

50 million
children are displaced. Children make up around 40% of the world's forcefully displaced people despite being only 30% of the world's population.

224 million
school-aged children are affected by crises globally of which 72 million are out of school. Girls who drop out of school are three times more likely to experience child marriage.

468 million
children live in conflict zones.

Children make up around half of the population needing humanitarian assistance.[2] In 2022, more than two-thirds of the world's children were living in a conflict-ridden country. In the same year, approximately 468 million children (18.8% or more than one in six) were living in a conflict zone[3], where the risk of child labour is three times the global average.[4]

A record of more than 50 million children are forcefully displaced from their homes as a result of conflict, violence and other crises. Of these, more than ten million children were recorded to have fled in 2023 alone. Children make up around 40% of the world's forcefully displaced people[5] despite being only 30% of the world's population.

Due to the protracted nature of conflicts, most children displaced by conflict will have to spend their entire childhood in displacement. Climate change continues to severely impact children. More than one billion children (nearly half of the world's children) live in areas with extremely high risk for climate-related impacts.[6] The overlapping nature of crises, such as conflicts coinciding with climate-related and socio-natural disasters, disproportionately impacts children.

These crises, exacerbated by the breakdown of social structures and economic instability, create conditions conducive to child exploitation, including sexual abuse, child labour, and forced recruitment into armed groups. Recognising the blurred lines between different forms of child exploitation, Terre des Hommes Netherlands' approach underscores the complexity of addressing these issues, particularly for children exposed to polyvictimisation and those in crises.

TdH NL defines child exploitation as 'an individual, group or organisation taking advantage of an imbalance of power to get a child to engage in activities that are detrimental to the child's well-being and development, and from which the alleged perpetrator(s) and/or a third party(ies) gain some advantage.'

1. (ReliefWeb, 2024) | 2. (Development Initiatives, 2023) | 3. (ReliefWeb, 2023) | 4. (ILO & UNICEF, 2021) |
5. (ReliefWeb, 2022) | 6. (UNICEF, 2021)

Root Causes

Child exploitation within humanitarian contexts is deeply interconnected with a complex array of global challenges, including poverty, conflict, fragility, climate-related emergencies, forced displacement, social and gender norms, and the dynamics inherent to humanitarian responses. Power imbalances related to intersecting identity factors, gender norms, and socio-economic disparities often leave many children without the necessary information, agency, or support to protect themselves, migrate safely, or secure alternative livelihoods. Additionally, unmet care, protection, and belonging needs within families, peer groups, schools, and communities render many children vulnerable to exploitation. Discrimination and social exclusion resulting from intersecting identity factors - such as disabilities, diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, caste, or refugee or internally displaced status - can drive some children towards negative coping mechanisms. Moreover, children who have experienced adverse childhood experiences, institutionalisation, or harmful practices are at increased risk of revictimisation. Inadequate or dysfunctional child protection systems, weak institutions, and legal policy frameworks often fall short of upholding human rights standards. Consequently, affected children are denied access to timely, comprehensive, and quality education, healthcare (including mental health and sexual and reproductive health services), social welfare, and justice.

Tackling the Challenge

Terre des Hommes Netherlands has developed the Humanitarian Action Thematic Programme with the overall goal of promoting the healthy development and well-being of children affected by humanitarian crises. Using a comprehensive co-creation process that included input from children, this Programme is designed to protect children from exploitation in the context of humanitarian crises.

The Humanitarian Action Thematic Programme's strategic framework outlines a comprehensive rights-based approach across six domains, highlighting the necessity of a holistic and integrated strategy. The Programme is rooted in the 2023-2030 Listen Up! Strategy, focusing on elevating children's voices, prioritising stakeholder collaboration, and driving systemic changes to make a lasting impact on children affected by crises.

1   **Survival Rights:** The Programme recognizes the direct connection between access to basic needs and the heightened risks of exploitation. It promotes meeting the immediate survival and protection needs of children during emergencies. These survival rights include sufficient and equitable access to food, water, sanitation and hygiene, shelter and clothing, health (including mental health), protection, and sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR) services.
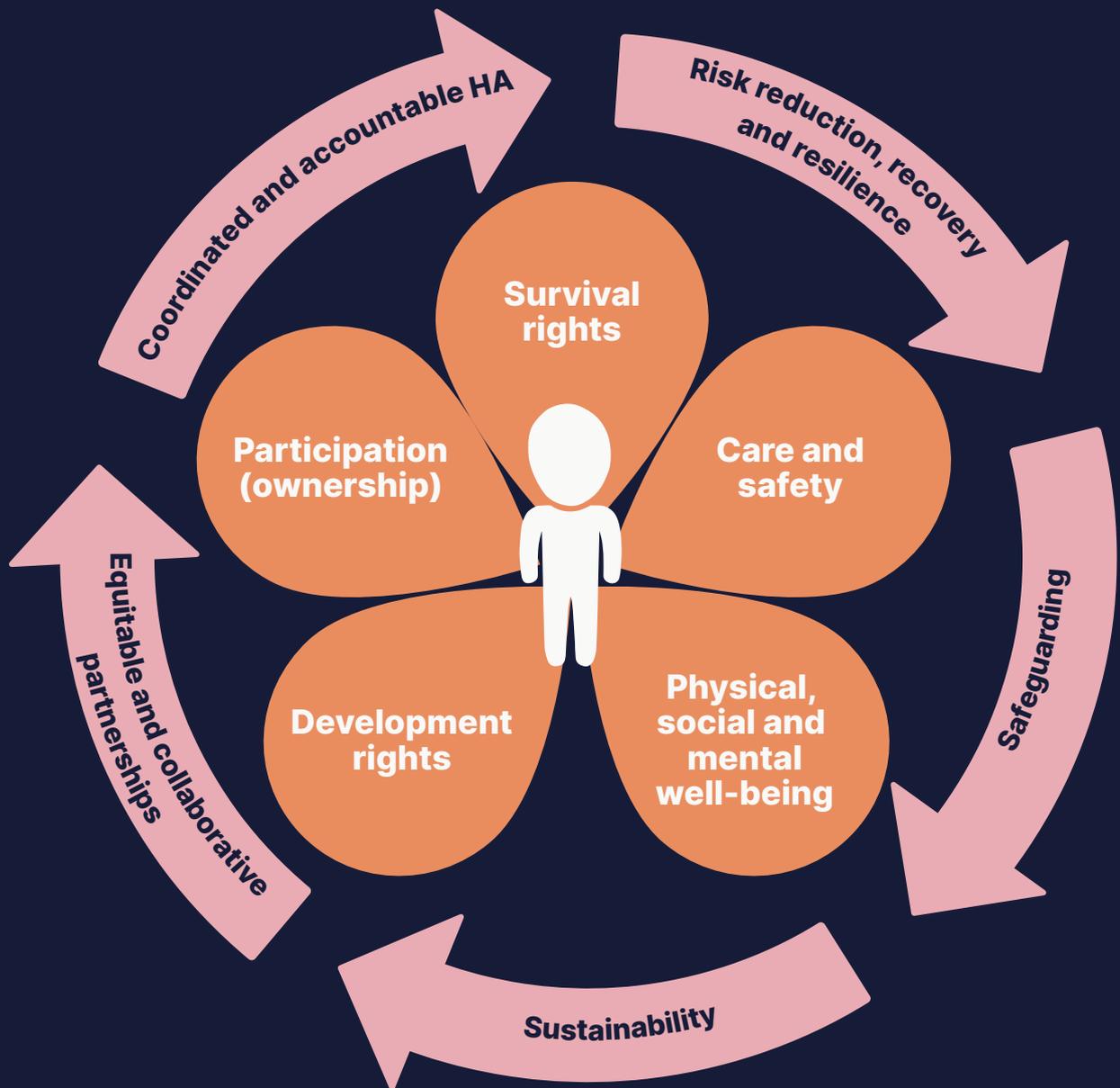
2   **Right to Care and Safety:** Recognising the importance of care and safety of children during humanitarian crises by their primary caregivers, the programme focuses on adequately supporting caregivers to cultivate and nurture trust in their interactions with the child, creating a sense of safety and stability for children.

3   **Right to Physical and Mental Health and Social Well-Being:** The Programme acknowledges the critical importance of safeguarding children's physical, mental, and social well-being for their overall development. This includes promoting social inclusion of children in the social fabric of their communities, along with providing psychosocial support and adequate health services. This domain strengthens community social support networks to support children, especially those experiencing compounded adversities.

4   **Right to Development:** The Programme works towards addressing the barriers to education and development posed by humanitarian crises. Advocating for equitable access to quality education and development opportunities for all children affected by humanitarian crises. This encompasses inclusive play and early learning, basic and accelerated schooling, vocational training, financial literacy, and age-appropriate life skills training.

5   **Right to Participation (Ownership):** The Programme promotes children's engagement in decisions that affect them, acknowledging their agency and enhancing the relevance and effectiveness of humanitarian responses. This includes creating platforms for children's voices to be heard and valued, and ensuring they have access to age-appropriate information.

6   **Right to a functioning humanitarian system:** In collaboration with others the Programme strives for an efficient, child-centred humanitarian response that prioritises children's needs, supporting their recovery, resilience, and risk reduction.

The diagram shows a central figure surrounded by six orange petals labelled:
- Survival rights
- Care and safety
- Physical, social and mental well-being
- Development rights
- Participation (ownership)

Surrounding pink arrows are labelled:
- Coordinated and accountable HA
- Risk reduction, recovery and resilience
- Safeguarding
- Sustainability
- Equitable and collaborative partnerships

Our approach comprises two primary project models: the **ACT model** (Addressing immediate needs of Children in Times of humanitarian crisis) and the **ChANGE model** (Children At the Center of Humanitarian Action, Nurturing their Growth and Empowerment). Each model is designed to protect children's rights during humanitarian crises but focuses on different aspects of intervention.

The ACT model is centred on immediate response and prevention strategies. It aims to protect children from exploitation during crises by directly addressing urgent risk factors. Through timely and tailored interventions, the ACT model prioritises the physical and emotional well-being of children, families, and communities. By providing protection assistance, we aim to mitigate exploitation risks.

Meanwhile, the ChANGE model emphasises the strengthening of protective factors for sustained child protection outcomes. This model works towards restoring and enhancing protective factors eroded by crises. Additionally, it tackles underlying risk factors, fostering resilience and recovery among children. By strengthening protective factors over time, the ChANGE model promotes lasting protection against exploitation and supports children's long-term well-being and resilience.

Both models align with the six thematic outcome areas outlined in our Theory of Change, ensuring comprehensive coverage of intervention strategies. By combining immediate risk mitigation with the reinforcement of protective factors, our approach aims to comprehensively address barriers to children's protection, promoting their rights and resilience amidst humanitarian crises.

Overarching Priorities and Principles

Terre des Hommes Netherlands commits to:

- **Collaboration and Partnerships**
  Leveraging collaboration with others and forming strategic partnerships at the local, national, and international levels. As catalysts for systemic change, Terre des Hommes Netherlands collaborates with diverse partners to build protective environments for children and create lasting changes in children's lives. Through child-centred, trauma-informed, gender-responsive and intersectional approaches we empower children and their communities, co-create solutions with and for children while ensuring their meaningful participation and influence. We work to leverage and complement the work of other agencies, NGOs, formal and informal community groups and government actors, based on an analysis of our optimal contribution to lasting changes in the lives of children at risk and survivors of exploitation.

- **Evidence and Knowledge**
  Generate evidence through research and learning to expand knowledge. We use our knowledge and expertise on humanitarian action and child exploitation to generate evidence through research and documented learning to expand knowledge, co-create solutions that are proven to work, and scale successful approaches through our networks. Guided by our Global Research Agenda, we seek to address identified gaps in knowledge about the intersectional risks of child exploitation in humanitarian crises. In addition, we aim to learn and share evidence about what works to prevent and respond to child exploitation in extremely challenging, humanitarian contexts.

- **Advocacy and Influencing**
  Enhancing advocacy and influence to ensure the protection of all children affected by humanitarian crises. We engage in targeted advocacy efforts to shape the humanitarian system at various levels, ensuring that combating child exploitation remains a priority in humanitarian action.

- **Local Adaptation**
  Recognising the diverse contexts of humanitarian crises, the Programme emphasises the importance of contextual adaptation, ensuring interventions are tailored to meet the specific needs and challenges of children and communities.

- **Sustainability**
  The two models identified will ensure the sustainability of our programs by addressing immediate needs while also working towards children's recovery and resilience.

- **Capacity Strengthening**
  The Programme's capacity building plan focuses on supporting local institutions to ensure effective context-appropriate responses to child exploitation. This plan emphasises mutual capacity sharing and learning.

- **Integrity and Safeguarding**
  The Programme integrates comprehensive safeguarding policies to ensure the safety and well-being of children, incorporating risk assessment, ethical engagement, and trauma-informed care.

- **Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning (MEAL)**
  A robust MEAL framework supports continuous learning, accountability, and adaptation, ensuring the effectiveness and relevance of interventions.