DRA CALL FOR PROPOSALS ON SAFETY AND PROTECTION - CHALLENGE BRIEF

Unaccompanied & separated children have access to faster, better coordinated and safer family tracing and reunification

MAIN DETAILS

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PROBLEM STATEMENT: “How can we tackle barriers that exist to access services related to safety and protection for the most vulnerable people in need of these services”

CURRENT CHALLENGE

Protection of the family unit is a fundamental human right\(^1\), yet forced migration caused by populations fleeing armed conflicts often places this in jeopardy. The ongoing conflict in the Central African Republic (CAR) has led many children to become separated from their parents, to live alone or with guardians, often without news of their biological family. The family remains the first circle of protection for a child; the absence of or a protracted separation from this unit can have irreversible consequences as children’s well-being and development depend very much on the security of family relationships and a predictable environment\(^2\).

A child without family protection is more vulnerable in CAR, where state services and community mechanisms are failing. Due to the recurrent armed conflict, the country is an increasingly unsafe space for children, causing a rise in the number of unaccompanied children and children associated with armed groups and forces. The process of locating parents for Family Tracing & Reunification is often difficult and time consuming, mainly due to the constant displacement of individuals in a context where 1 Central African out of 4 is living outside of her/his home. The number of internally displaced people has increased by 15% since August 2018, reaching 656,000 IDPs of which 51% are children\(^3\).

The challenge in reuniting children with their families according to their specific needs and best interests lays in the speed, cost, information sensitivity and coordination of the process. Different NGOs and state organizations charged with the task of reuniting families lack innovative methods in the face of numerous barriers and lengthy processes.

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\(^1\) Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 16(3)
\(^2\) UNICEF, Working Group on Children Affected by Armed Conflict and Displacement
\(^3\) Central African Republic (CAR) HNO 2019, UN OCHA
IMPACT GOAL

More unaccompanied/separated children are reunited with their biological family faster, more efficiently, through a safer and coordinated process, and according to their specific needs and best interests.

Faster process: The timeframe in which family tracing and reunification occurs (an average of 30 days) creates a more insecure situation for an unaccompanied/separated child. A more efficient process would allow family research to commence within 24 hours of collecting data on family members. Evidence\(^4\) suggests that social workers based in one area are concurrently conducting family research in other areas of the country, requiring additional logistical/financial arrangements. As a consequence, social workers often expect to have several parents to search for in the same sub-prefecture and research rarely starts before 3 weeks, and often months after the identification of an unaccompanied or separated child.

Cheaper: The research process costs at least 25 EUR/day, excluding onsite transportation costs. A minimum of three successful visits are standard to prepare for reunification. A more efficient process would allow for social workers to travel only once the family members have been localized and consequently conduct the family assessment and mediation work at once.

More secure: The protection of Personal Data of beneficiaries and staff is necessary to safeguard their lives\(^5\). Social workers often do not follow Information Security principles that fully prevent the disclosure of information to unauthorized individuals/systems. The absence of security practices specifically relates to confidentiality; this includes the printing of documents or sending information by email or USB. Therefore, a more secure system that protects the personal data of separated children and their families is necessary.

Better coordinated: There is a lack of proper collaboration between entities due to the sensitive information at hand and absence of an appropriate information-sharing platform protecting all parties. Improved coordination and networking among agencies and individuals working with children will reduce time spent on reunification.

ASSUMPTIONS MADE

- The breakdown of social structures and services accompanying major crises means that communities and states themselves may not be in a position to provide the necessary protection and care for children without families. It is therefore imperative that humanitarian organizations ensure that the most vulnerable children are protected.
- The state has a significant data gap and lacks the necessary framework to regularly collect, analyse, store and manage data for various purposes including decision support, family research and eventual reunification, among others.
- The quasi-absence of the state in some parts of the country hinders possible coordination mechanisms in identification and family research with an aim to facilitate family reunification.

\(^4\) This is based on current experiences from the implementation of the 5\(^{th}\) phase of the CAR Joint Response (programme funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

\(^5\) Handbook on data protection in Humanitarian Action, ICRC
RISKS IN PURSUING THIS CHALLENGE

- Resistance to sharing of personal data or provision of false or incomplete data by children about their families, making it difficult to identify the families.
- The challenge faced in collecting personal information while ensuring confidentiality and GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) compliance, placing children and families at further risk.
- Lack of cooperation of case workers from different humanitarian actors/NGOs in the field.
- Lack of state participation and support, which may hinder successful implementation. This is mitigated by the fact that Plan in the Central African Republic was part of the development of the FTR\textsuperscript{6} standards and is in close coordination with the authorities responsible for this.
- Deterioration of the security situation in country, putting humanitarian access in jeopardy and leading to an increase in violence and recruitment of children in armed groups.

NEXT STEPS

Get Insights: Analyse past and present interventions by Plan and other organizations (e.g. Unicef, ICRC\textsuperscript{7}), at national, regional and international level, that were implemented in the area of Family Tracing & Reunification in emergency contexts to analyse existing approaches and possibly build on them.

Unpack the problem:

- Conduct focus group discussions with vulnerable groups to further specify their needs and identify solutions. As the co-lead of the Child Protection cluster alongside UNICEF in CAR, Plan will brainstorm solutions with other (I)NGOs, including fellow Dutch Relief Alliance members SOS and IRC\textsuperscript{8}.
- Team up with stakeholders: communities, government institutions (Ministry of the Promotion of Women, Family and Child Protection), private companies, the academic world, social enterprises and start-ups to brainstorm and discuss existing and possible new solutions. Based on the availability of interested parties, we will facilitate that discussion by hosting a meeting in Plan International’s office in Amsterdam. We are eager to know your perspective on the topic, do not hesitate to send us an email and share your thoughts!

Solution: Work with vulnerable groups and government institutions on the identified solution.

Business model: Work with government and civil society to pilot identified solution while continuously monitoring and adapting

Scale: With successful solutions, scale up. The adoption of an innovative approach to family tracing and reunification can benefit other neighboring countries where family separation is a significant challenge, such as Cameroon and Chad.

\textsuperscript{6} Family Tracing & Reunification
\textsuperscript{7} The International Committee of the Red Cross in CAR
\textsuperscript{8} SOS Children’s village and International Rescue Committee (operationally merged with Stichting Vluchteling) are conducting Protection activities with Plan International in the Central African Republic under the umbrella of a Joint Response funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and therefore would be main users of this innovation