Unaccompanied Children in Haiti

Registration, Interim Care, Family Tracing and Reunification

In complex emergencies, it is frequently unclear whether a child who is alone has been separated from family members, orphaned, or abandoned. The uncertainty of a child's status coupled with the need for immediate protection, and the goal of a permanent family for all children, necessitates a phased and systematic approach to child placement. The Child Protection Sub-Cluster in Haiti and its member agencies including the GOH, UNICEF, ICRC and USAID have recommended the following priority actions in this phased process: registration of unaccompanied children, foster and interim care placement if appropriate, family tracing and reunification.

Registration -- Child protection teams in Haiti continue to register separated and unaccompanied children identified at medical facilities, camps, and other locations. Registered children are provided identification bracelets and picture identification cards**.** Registration efforts prioritize those most likely to be vulnerable to trafficking, exploitation or abuse including:

- Children under age 5
- Girls
- Children with, or at risk of, mental and physical disability (including children known to be in a situation of abuse or exploitation)
- Restaveks who have become separated from their regular employers and/or who are who are in immediate danger

Interim and Foster Care – In the short term, Interim care is being provided for children separated from their families until they are reunited, placed with foster parents, or other long-term arrangements for care are made. According to the Child Protection Sub-Cluster, a system for immediate referral of especially vulnerable unaccompanied children to temporary interim care arrangements is now in place. Interim care spaces have been identified, and referral of the most vulnerable unaccompanied children requiring care has begun. Interim cares sites are not publicized due to security concerns. Over the next few weeks, the Child Protection Sub-cluster will begin proactively recruiting foster parents locally.

Family Tracing and reunification -- During emergency situations many children and families spontaneously reunite without the help of intermediaries. Save the Children reports from Haiti that many children and families are finding each other each day. For those children who've not been reunited, family tracing and reunification (FTR) services are necessary. With the support of the Child Protection Sub-Cluster, a protocol for FTR in Haiti is underway guided by extensive experience in previous emergencies (e.g. the Rwandan genocide and the Asian tsunami) and technical guidance, such as the *Inter-agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children*. The Guiding Principles are based on international human rights, humanitarian, and refugee law and are based on extensive practical experience from other emergency situations. Interviews with children, family and community members are an essential step in the reunification process, as are the establishment of mechanisms to monitor children's situations post placement. USAID funded partner Save the Children has already trained 50 social workers in FTR. Continued capacity building of social workers and other child protection staff in both private and public sectors, in coordination with the GOH, will be essential to securing safety for Children in Haiti in the long term.