

Transforming Refugee Response: RefugePoint's Impacts

Vol. 4: Strengthening Child Protection Capacity for Resettlement

Quick summary: *RefugePoint has contributed to expanding access to resettlement and other durable solutions for unaccompanied and separated child refugees by acting as the primary actor engaged in drawing attention to chronic capacity gaps and policy deficiencies and working with UNHCR to address the same through staff deployments and policy strengthening.*

Systems change description

RefugePoint has contributed to expanding access to resettlement and other durable solutions for unaccompanied and separated child refugees by strengthening child protection staffing resources and policies within the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). This evaluation found that RefugePoint has contributed to this change by increasing UNHCR's capacity for conducting Best Interest Determinations (BIDs)² through deploying specialized staff, known as experts, to UNHCR,³ mapping and persistently spotlighting capacity gaps for child protection and strengthening UNHCR's global guidance documents for staff on child protection, introduced in 2021. This document, UNHCR's Best Interest Procedure (BIP) Guidelines, incorporates insights and recommendations from RefugePoint and other partners directly engaged in child protection and resettlement. RefugePoint has also played a similar role building NGO and government partner capacity on child protection.

Need for change

Children account for more than half of all refugees globally and face extreme vulnerabilities and stark challenges, especially those who are unaccompanied or separated from their families.⁴ Staffing resources for conducting child protection

ABOUT THIS SERIES

RefugePoint partners with refugees to access life-changing solutions and transforms how the world supports them. This series showcases examples of how RefugePoint contributes to systems change, which we understand as changing one or more of the factors that keep existing refugee response systems from serving refugees adequately and equitably. These factors include policies, practices, resources, relationships between actors, distributions of power, and mindsets (beliefs and ideologies).¹ This brief presents the results of an externally-led, participatory evaluation that draws on extensive interviews with RefugePoint partners, colleagues, and other stakeholders, participatory sense-making activities with RefugePoint staff, and document review. The brief summarizes what has changed, why change was needed, how change came about, RefugePoint's unique role, and the relevance of the change for refugees.

1 Kania, J., Kramer, J., & Senge, P. (2018). "[The water of systems change.](#)"

2 Best Interests Determinations (BID) and Best Interests Assessments (BIA) are processes designed to ensure that actions regarding individual children in refugee situations give primary considerations to the child's best interests and incorporate the child's participation. They are an intensive and required step in the resettlement process for unaccompanied minors and those separated from their parents or legal guardians. They are also often required for children traveling with only one parent. Best Interest Procedures (BIP) is a broader case management framework incorporating BID/BIA. See [2021 UNHCR Best Interests Procedure Guidelines](#) for more information.

3 Through the UNHCR Resettlement Deployment Scheme, NGO partners hire professionals who are assigned to work in UNHCR operations as employees fully integrated into the UNHCR teams. For more information, please see UNHCR's Resettlement Handbook for more information on the [resettlement deployment scheme](#).

4 UNHCR. (2025). "[Children.](#)"

assessments with child refugees have long been stretched, leading to delays (sometimes permanent) in the resettlement process for child refugees and their family members. Some may age out of childhood while awaiting child protection assessments, losing eligibility for special programs for unaccompanied children. Although the efforts of RefugePoint and other partners have contributed to expanding UNHCR's staffing capacity for child protection, demand for these services has grown ever faster, leaving persistent gaps.

Levers of change

Levers of change are relatively small changes that actors such as RefugePoint can make that can bring about a bigger change in the overall system.⁵ The evaluation identified the following as the most important levers used by RefugePoint to help bring about a change in the system.

Developing staff capacity and deploying them for impact: RefugePoint has long employed staff with child protection expertise. By the end of 2024, RefugePoint Experts assisted nearly 23,000 child refugees with child protection casework globally.⁶ These staff members have also helped identify capacity gaps for child protection and have contributed to addressing them. For example, in 2011 RefugePoint responded to an identified backlog of BIDs for refugee children in the Kakuma Refugee Camp by sending a team supported with private funding to work with UNHCR and Lutheran World Federation to successfully address the backlog. In 2012, RefugePoint deployed a team, again supported by private funding, to address outstanding BIP needs in Cairo, Egypt working with UNHCR and partners to improve local referral and BIP processes, in addition to working through the backlog itself. As part of that mission, the team developed tools and made recommendations to strengthen and standardize the BID process and improve the protection environment generally for refugee children in Cairo.⁷

Highlighting unmet needs: In 2011, RefugePoint launched an effort with partners to advocate and work together with UNHCR on child protection within resettlement, in recognition of the significant gap between the need for BIDs and UNHCR's capacity to provide them. RefugePoint organized the UNHCR-NGO Informal Network for Child Protection in Africa which included UNHCR and several global and U.S.-based organizations working in resettlement and/or with unaccompanied minors. With RefugePoint leading the network's initiatives for the two years it was in existence (2011-2012), the network held virtual meetings, met with UNHCR on ways to address gaps, organized a conference with members and other relevant actors



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Inge De Langhe, UNHCR

(UNICEF, U.S. State Department, foundations, and private donors), issued a joint statement, and completed an exercise mapping and assessing BIP capacity that highlighted significant gaps across Africa.

Building capacity of others in the sector: RefugePoint also provides child protection training at regional and local levels for UNHCR and partner NGO staff. A RefugePoint staff person described RefugePoint's approach as follows: “*We really encourage our Experts to conduct trainings in child protection.... We even provide training funds available to experts. We invested in a training and technical manager in our Nairobi office to support Experts if they need additional support in figuring out how to create a curriculum or to conduct trainings. So we are doubling down and have always doubled down on this capacity-building effort so that our experts can strengthen the systems and abilities... whether it's UNHCR staff or NGO staff or local government staff, so that when our Experts leave, there's something more concrete and sustainable.*” (Zack Gross, RefugePoint) A UNHCR representative commented that RefugePoint trainings are a unique aspect of its deployments: “*RefugePoint is very actively supporting with capacity building and training of people, not only their own staff but also staff from other partners and government and - jointly with UNHCR - colleagues from UNHCR field offices.*” (Inge De Langhe, UNHCR)

Leveraging private funding: Lastly, RefugePoint has leveraged private, unrestricted funding to advance its work with UNHCR on child protection, enabling it to design new initiatives independently. The flexibility enabled by private funding has helped RefugePoint pilot effective, replicable ways of working and to offer some of its services to UNHCR free of charge, as in the examples

⁵ Meadows, D. (2015). “[Leverage Points-Places to Intervene in a System](#).”

⁶ RefugePoint internal statistics.

⁷ Partners involved in serving unaccompanied and separated minors in Cairo at the time were: Africa and Middle East Refugee Assistance (AMERA), Psycho-Social Training Institute of Cairo (PSTIC), Caritas, Tadamon, Catholic Relief Services, ICRC, Refuge Egypt, and St. Andrew's Refugee Services. See also Cone, D. and Tjia, M. L. (2012).



A young Congolese refugee with his school book outside of his home on the outskirts of Nairobi, Kenya.
Photo by Tobin Jones

of staff deployments to Kakuma and Cairo described above. RefugePoint has consistently used private funding for deployments where it felt such funding added value and made a unique contribution, as the following quote from a former staff person explained: *“The additional support, the in-kind support of deployments through private funding gives RefugePoint a lot of flexibility, and makes them stand out from the other partners.”* (Johanna Babb, former RefugePoint staff)

RefugePoint’s contribution

What unique role did RefugePoint play in pulling the levers that helped bring about this change? Drawing on a typology of roles actors can play in advocacy work, the evaluation found that RefugePoint was the **primary actor** advocating for expanded child protection capacity as part of resettlement operations and piloting targeted BID/BIA missions to locations with significant backlogs, such as the Kakuma and Cairo examples described above. It also convened relevant stakeholders to map the capacity gaps and strategize to address them, as described above. Finally, it developed specialized child protection deployments focused on BIDs/BIAs for the purposes of resettlement as a regular part of its resettlement deployments to UNHCR. While the International Catholic Migration Commission already fielded a few such deployments, RefugePoint’s expansion and focus on this issue

helped lead to other deployment partners adding this capacity (Danish Refugee Council and Church World Service’s Africa Regional Deployment Unit), which is now a standard-funded aspect of the resettlement deployment scheme. UNHCR continues to engage and fund these deployments as of the time of writing. RefugePoint’s high-quality work addressing this gap in capacity contributed to greater donor awareness and diversification in funding. In 2013, UNHCR successfully lobbied the Government of Norway to fund child protection staff positions to conduct casework and facilitate training through the deployment program, funding that lasted through the mid-2010s. Private foundations have also provided funding to support this work after being made aware of the needs by RefugePoint.

RefugePoint consistently worked to make the need for child protection capacity a priority among key stakeholders. A UNHCR staff person noted RefugePoint’s value in asking the right questions to UNHCR during global gatherings that keep child protection on the agenda with key stakeholders. *“That dialogue ... asking the right questions to UNHCR was important to keep child protection on the agendas internally.”* (Monika Sandvik, UNHCR)

RefugePoint also played a meaningful role in developing and implementing BID guidance, and later the 2021 BIP Guidelines, which have had a lasting impact on

8 Coe, J., & Schlagen, R. (2019). [“No Royal Road. Finding and Following the Natural Pathways in Advocacy Evaluation.”](#) Center for Evaluation Innovation.



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Monika Sandvik, UNHCR

UNHCR’s child protection practice. UNHCR invited a RefugePoint Child Protection Expert to Geneva as one of a small group of specialists asked to help revise the guidance. A UNHCR staff person described the relevance of RefugePoint’s child protection casework and contributions to the BID Field Handbook in 2011: *“The engagement ... looping back from the casework that they had done, or their social workers had done... The deployment scheme ... was really very valuable to*

UNHCR and brought additional capacity to operations that were struggling to comply with the guidance and the tools that have been developed.” (Monika Sandvik, UNHCR)

Relevance for refugees

RefugePoint’s contributions to strengthening child protection systems globally have ensured that more unaccompanied and separated refugee children have access to resettlement and other durable solutions that accord with their best interests. Interviewees spoke to the positive impact of resettlement on unaccompanied and separated children. One staff member noted that those in need of BIDs are often the most vulnerable and in need of resettlement, and that the lack of capacity to conduct BID/BIA can significantly hold up a case and, in effect, relegate them to the back of the line. As the staffer said, *“Having faster BIDs allows their resettlement cases to move a lot faster. So that’s huge, especially because many minors age out before they’re able to be processed. That’s the main thing. And not just for the minor themselves, but for any family members linked to the case.”* (Amy Slaughter, RefugePoint)

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Attribution

Elizabeth Frank conducted and authored this evaluation. Patrick Guyer and Amy Slaughter served as editors and convenors of the evaluation.