



**Recommendations for Child-Friendly Refugee Status Determination
Procedures.** MIRPS Regional Technical Team on Reception, Admission, and Case
Processing. 2024



I. Background

The Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (MIRPS) is a concrete application of the Global Compact on Refugees, which promotes regional cooperation among countries of origin, transit, and destination to enhance responsibility sharing in matters of prevention, protection, and durable solutions. It also embraces a participatory approach by directly involving individuals with protection needs and the communities that host them.

Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, and Panama implement National Action Plans while also working jointly and with a regional perspective through the MIRPS Regional Technical Teams (RTTs).

In line with the regional commitment presented at the Global Refugee Forum in 2023, in 2024 the MIRPS countries, through the RTT on Reception, Admission, and Case Processing, continued to strengthen national institutions responsible for refugee status determination (RSD) processes. This was achieved through the enhancement of technical capacities and the development of national asylum systems, procedures, and good practices that increase efficiency, fairness, and quality, in accordance with each country's capacity and needs, and with the support and assistance of the MIRPS Support Platform members, UNHCR, the OAS, and other stakeholders.

According to the 2024 MIRPS Annual Report, by mid-2024, the Americas hosted 20.3 million forcibly displaced persons and others in need of protection and assistance. UNHCR estimates that women and girls account for 46% of forcibly displaced and stateless persons in the region. Where data is available, children make up 28% of the population in the Americas. Recognizing the high number of children and adolescents seeking asylum in MIRPS countries, one of the regional priorities was to conduct a series of discussions that culminated in a set of recommendations for accessible refugee status determination procedures for children and adolescents.

The following document presents the outcomes of these dialogues, and the recommendations developed based on the working sessions held by RTT members in 2024. These are grounded in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and informed by [UNHCR's Technical Guidance on Child-Friendly Procedures](#), as well as other relevant international and national instruments.



II. **Inter-American Standards on the Protection of Asylum-Seeking and Refugee Children and Adolescents, and in Particular, Their Right to Participate in Any Process That Affects Them**

In 2023, the General Assembly of the Organization of American States (OAS) adopted the Declaration for the Protection and Integration of Migrant and Refugee Children and Adolescents in the Americas¹. This Declaration represents a milestone within the Inter-American system, as it consolidates the political commitment of States in the region to protect and uphold the rights of migrant, asylum-seeking, refugee, and stateless children and adolescents. Initially led by the Governments of Colombia and Chile, the initiative was endorsed by the seven MIRPS States as well as by other countries across the continent. It brings to light the challenges faced by this population and the necessary responses to address them. The Declaration sets a foundation for strengthening regional cooperation through a shared responsibility approach, recognizing the progress made by mechanisms such as MIRPS and other regional processes in the areas of migration and international protection. It also highlights the importance of coordinated action among various stakeholders and places migrant children and adolescents at the center of the response, through a human rights-based approach, regardless of their migration status, and in strict adherence to the principle of the best interests of the child.

Additionally, through its various resolutions, the OAS General Assembly has addressed the protection of asylum-seeking and refugee children and adolescents. In particular, it has urged “Member States to ensure that migrant children and adolescents, whether accompanied, unaccompanied, or separated from their families, receive specialized assistance and protection in any situation that affects them; and to encourage countries in the region to implement, as necessary, cooperation agreements and protocols for the protection, assistance, and care of children and adolescents in contexts of mobility—accompanied, unaccompanied, or separated from their families—upholding the best interests of the child as a primary consideration, and respecting and protecting their rights, including the right to family reunification, taking into account the applicable obligations of States under international human rights law, and as appropriate, the ‘Declaration for the Protection and Integration of Migrant and Refugee Children and Adolescents in the Americas’.”²

From a jurisprudential perspective, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, in the case *Córdoba v. Paraguay*, emphasized the need for children and adolescents to participate in proceedings that concern them.³ Likewise, Resolution 5/23 of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) underscores the importance of ensuring the participation of children and adolescents,

¹ OAS General Assembly, [Declaration for the Protection and Integration of Migrant and Refugee Children in the Americas](#), AG/DEC. 111 (LIII-O/23), 2023.

² OAS General Assembly, Resolution “Advancing Hemispheric Initiatives on Integral Development: Promoting Resilience”, AG/RES. 3013 (LIV-O/24), para. 48.

³ IACHR, *Case of Córdoba v. Paraguay*, September 4, 2023, para. 79.



both individually and collectively, within the framework of the Commission.⁴ Lastly, the *Inter-American Principles on the Human Rights of All Migrants, Refugees, Stateless Persons, and Victims of Human Trafficking*, adopted by the IACHR, recognize that the best interests of the child must be a primary consideration in all measures concerning children, and that children and adolescents have the right to be heard, to express their views, and to participate in any judicial or administrative process that affects them.⁵

III. General Recommendations:

1. **Ensure adaptations are made throughout all protection procedures**—including arrival, reception, registration, refugee status determination, best interest assessment of children and adolescents, and durable solutions—so they respond to their specific developmental needs and vulnerabilities.
2. **Ensure accessibility and age-appropriateness** so that procedures are understandable and accessible to all children and adolescents, without barriers related to language, culture, or disability.
3. **Prioritize timeliness and emotional well-being** by giving precedence to cases involving children and adolescents to avoid unnecessary delays in their processes. If a child or adolescent is in an emotionally challenging situation, allow sufficient time for recovery.
4. **Train responsible personnel**, including reception and security staff, on child-sensitive approaches, communication skills, and child protection, to ensure respectful and professional treatment at every stage of the procedure.
5. **Facilitate access to legal representatives, guardians, or trained personnel who can support children and adolescents throughout the process**, providing adequate assistance tailored to their needs.
6. **Promote the principle of equality and non-discrimination** by ensuring that all children and adolescents are treated equally, regardless of their age, nationality, or circumstances of arrival, and by eliminating any barriers that may hinder their access to protection.
7. **Ensure confidentiality and protect all personal information of children and adolescents**, guaranteeing that such information is used solely for their protection and well-being.

⁴IACHR. [Resolution 5/23. Participation of Children and Adolescents in the Framework of the IACHR](#), March 23, 2023.

⁵ IACHR, [Inter-American Principles on the Human Rights of all Migrants, Refugees, Stateless persons and Victims of Human Trafficking](#), 2019.



IV. Specific Recommendations:

Considerations of Relevant Legal Frameworks:

- 8. To ensure the protection and participation of children and adolescents in procedures, it is essential to consider the following principles established in the Convention on the Rights of the Child:**
 - a. State oversight in protection measures (Art. 3): States are responsible for overseeing protection procedures implemented by partner organizations.
 - b. Right not to be arbitrarily separated from the family (Art. 9): In cases where separation may occur, C&A must actively participate in the process.
 - c. Right to express their views (Art. 12): C&A have the right to express their views on matters affecting them, taking into account their age and maturity.
 - d. Right to be heard directly or through a representative (Art. 12.2).
 - e. Freedom of expression (Art. 13): Includes the right to seek, receive, and impart information.
 - f. Access to information and the media (Art. 17).
 - g. Participation in cultural and artistic life (Art. 31).

On the Participation of Children and Adolescents:

- 9. Recognize the participation of children and adolescents as a fundamental right** that must be guaranteed in all procedures that affect them, in line with the best interests of the child.
- 10. Listening to children and adolescents is essential for decision-making that affects their lives**, allowing them to express their experiences and views during interviews and procedures, with communication methods adapted to each child's or adolescent's age and developmental level.
- 11. Ensure compliance with international standards and the principles** set forth in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), particularly Articles 3, 9, 12, 13, 17, and 31.
- 12. Provide clear and accessible information in age-appropriate language** so that children and adolescents can understand the process, who will be listening to them, and the impact their input may have.
- 13. Guarantee that the participation of children and adolescents is not merely symbolic**, but that their views meaningfully influence the development and outcome of procedures.

On Accessibility, Safety, and Child-Friendly Physical Environments:

- 14. Assess and address barriers to access** by identifying and eliminating legal, regulatory, or documentation obstacles that limit refugee children and adolescents' access to protection services.
- 15. Ensure the availability of services in areas** where refugee children and adolescents and their families reside.
- 16. Clearly signpost service areas** using simple instructions tailored to the age and comprehension levels of children and adolescents.



17. **Design interview spaces to be friendly, safe, and free from re-traumatization**, with warm colors, soft music, and child-appropriate furnishings, ensuring privacy and confidentiality while avoiding emotional or psychological harm.
18. **Avoid prolonged waiting times** that may disrupt children and adolescents' education and daily activities.
19. **Provide supervision and activities for children and adolescents** while their parents or caregivers are being interviewed, including access to play and socialization materials.
20. **Consider basic needs** such as access to water, food, and medical care, and inform children and adolescents at the start of the process about the location of restrooms and other available facilities.

On Support and Safeguarding Measures:

21. **Implement emotional support mechanisms and psychological accompaniment** during and after procedures, considering the impact of recounting traumatic experiences, including separation, on children and adolescents' well-being.
22. **Establish clear protocols for identifying and responding to additional protection risks**, ensuring prompt referrals to specialized services when necessary.
23. **Ensure access to legal assistance**, trusted representatives, or specialized child advocates who can facilitate their participation and understanding of the process, considering its complexity.
24. **Enforce strict measures to protect the privacy of children and adolescents**, ensuring that any shared information is securely handled and disclosed only to authorized actors, in accordance with the best interests of the child.

On Support Measures During Asylum Interviews:

25. **Begin the asylum/refugee interview with a clear introduction in a safe setting**, clearly identifying oneself, explaining the equipment to be used, and describing the purpose of the interview in age-appropriate language. Ensure the interview is conducted without the caregiver's presence if they pose a risk to the child, and explain the confidentiality of the shared information, including when and how it may need to be disclosed.
26. **Conduct interviews with sensitivity, empathy, and acceptance of the child's emotions**, including: starting with general and easy questions before moving on to more specific ones; using open-ended and follow-up questions to help the child continue their narrative without feeling pressured; maintaining an informal and friendly tone to build trust; avoiding rigid question-and-answer dynamics; reassuring the child that there are no right or wrong answers and that it is okay not to know or not to answer. Avoid interrupting, be attentive to non-verbal cues, and never force a child to continue if they do not wish to speak.
27. **Conclude the interview by clearly explaining the procedure, its purpose**, and possible outcomes; allowing time for the child to express feelings, concerns, and ask questions; and providing clear information on next steps and approximate timelines, including the contact information of the office. Ensure referral to appropriate services based on the child's needs.



V. Next Steps Identified by MIRPS Countries for Adapting Accessible Refugee Status Determination Procedures for Children and Adolescents:

- Strengthen policies and resource management by identifying needs and bringing them to the attention of decision-makers. Request external cooperation when necessary to ensure appropriate care.
- Conduct assessments to understand the specific needs of children and adolescents and of asylum/refugee systems, identifying suitable locations and designing child-appropriate service areas.
- Develop a regional roadmap to create guidance documents and care manuals, including specialized protocols and priority referral pathways in cases of sexual violence, exploitation, and human trafficking.
- Provide specialized and continuous training for officials responsible for the care of children and adolescents.
- Conduct a comprehensive review of available informational materials to identify and implement necessary adaptations, ensuring that content is accessible, understandable, and appropriate for children and adolescents, respecting their age, developmental level, and context.
- Clarify the internal service pathways within institutions, ensuring that procedures are understandable and accessible for children and adolescents, their families, and involved personnel.
- Ensure the sustainability of initiatives through coordination with key stakeholders.



Good practices of MIRPS States on child-friendly procedures

Protocol for Case Processing by the Child and Adolescent Protection Boards – El Salvador <i>Department for the Follow-up of the Unit for the Protection of Individual Rights, CONAPINA</i>	
Implementing institutions	CONAPINA, as the governing body for the protection of children and adolescents in El Salvador.
Strategic partners	National Protection System (PGR, FGR, PDDH, MINSAL, MINEDUCYT, PNC, ISDEMU, among others).
Duration	Indefinite
General description	<p>The Child and Adolescent Protection Boards, upon receiving a report or complaint regarding a threat or violation of the rights of children or adolescents, activate the National Protection System. According to the nature of the reported facts, they issue protective measures in accordance with the three types of procedures established by the “<i>Crecer Juntos</i>” Law for the Comprehensive Protection of Early Childhood, Children, and Adolescents, as outlined in Articles 239 and subsequent. The Boards may issue three types of protective measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) support and coordination measures; ii) placement measures; iii) sanction procedures or dispositions.
Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timely response to children and adolescents facing threats or violations of their rights • Guarantee of the right to a response • Guarantee of the right to be heard • Physical and psychological well-being of the child or adolescent • Immediate safety (through placement measures) • Adequate medical care • Continuity in education (reintegrating children into the educational system) • Participation in recreational activities • Access to social services • Legal representation • Empowerment in rights and responsibilities • Life skills development • Prevention of future abuse • Awareness and sensitization
Lessons learned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinated work with institutions contributes to the effectiveness of protective measures issued for early childhood, children, and adolescents. • Monitoring the enforcement of protective measures is essential to verify their effectiveness and, if necessary, to implement alternative actions or measures that fulfill the intended purpose.



Attention to Children Accompanied by Only One Parent

Department for Refugee Status Determination, Guatemalan Migration Institute

Implementing institution	Department for Refugee Status Determination Sub-Directorate for Fundamental Rights of Migrants Guatemalan Migration Institute
Location	Guatemala
Duration	Permanent
General Description	Currently, applications are received from children accompanied by only one parent. A team of psychologists conducts a parental evaluation to assess the child's contact with the absent parent and the current circumstances.
Results	Simplified refugee application process for children accompanied by one parent and facilitated presentation before the National Refugee Commission.

Attention to Unaccompanied Children in Need of International Protection

Department for Refugee Status Determination, Guatemalan Migration Institute

Implementing Institutions	Guatemalan Migration Institute (IGM) Secretariat of Social Welfare (SBS) Office of the Attorney General (PGN)
Strategic partners	UNHCR provides technical support
Location	Guatemala
Duration	Permanent
General Description	Any public or private entity that identifies an unaccompanied child in transit refers the case immediately to PGN, which transfers the child to a shelter run by SBS. The transfer may be conducted with the support of another entity. SBS and/or PGN staff assess the child's need for international protection. The initial response is coordinated with DRER, and a psychosocial report is submitted. Legal representation is provided by PGN.
Results	Prioritization of the child's application for international protection Adherence to the best interests of the child, and the principles of non-discrimination, family unity, non-violence, dignity, and non-revictimization Close coordination with PGN, SBS, the judiciary, and IGM Fulfillment of the child's international protection needs, including consideration of the request in family reunification processes
Lessons Learned	Collaborative efforts yield effective results Identifying international protection needs allows for a more expedited response



Circles of Protection for Migrant Children and Their Families – Mexico
Secretariat of Health and National System for Integral Family Development (DIF)

Implementing Institutions	National System for Integral Family Development (DIF)
Strategic partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Migration Institute (INM) • Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance (COMAR) • National Council to Prevent Discrimination (CONAPRED) • Secretariat of Health (SS) • Secretariat of Labor and Social Welfare (STPS) • National Employment Service (SNE) • Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) • National Institute for Adult Education (INEA) • Secretariat of Welfare (SB) • National Institute for Women (INMUJERES) • International Organization for Migration (IOM) • United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
Location	Huixtla-Comaltitlán Coastal Highway, km 241 s/n, Huixtla Municipality, Chiapas, ZIP Code 30649
General Description	<p>In January 2021, reforms related to the rights of children and adolescents in human mobility came into force, aiming to reinforce the principles of non-detention, protection, and the best interests of the child, in accordance with the General Law on the Rights of Children and Adolescents.</p> <p>Under these reforms, DIF systems at all levels are mandated to provide shelter and ensure the protection of the rights of children and adolescents. Protection agencies are responsible for determining the child’s best interests, developing restitution plans, and monitoring their implementation.</p> <p>The National DIF has focused on coordinating with various federal government institutions, international agencies, and civil society to strengthen protection and restitution of rights for children in human mobility in transit through Mexico.</p> <p>In January 2024, the first Protection Circle was established in Huixtla, Chiapas, to provide families with comprehensive care, shelter, food, communication, psychological support, migration process guidance, and information on available Social Assistance Centers across the country.</p> <p>Support is also provided for protection orders, restitution plans, information on human rights, refugee status recognition, legal representation, and access to services—always in compliance with the principle of the best interests of the child.</p>
Results	<p>The objective of the National DIF is to replicate Baja California’s model and establish Protection Circles in areas of high risk for migrant children. The Huixtla center assisted over 335 individuals in migration contexts.</p> <p>Due to the success of this initiative, the plan is to install 16 additional Circles of Protection in five U.S.-bordering states (Baja California, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Tamaulipas), as well as in Veracruz, Chiapas, Oaxaca, Hidalgo, Estado de México, and Mexico City.</p>
Lessons learned	This model aims to expand services for this population and encourages participation from additional institutions to safeguard the best interests of children and ensure respect for the human rights of people in mobility contexts.