

GUIDANCE NOTE, CIVIL-MILITARY COORDINATION COVID-19 HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE v1.1-1

The COVID-19 pandemic will affect children's well-being, development and protection including disrupting the environments, in which they can survive, learn and be protected. Military and security actors¹ are likely to be involved in government's responses to COVID-19. Measures used to prevent and control the spread of COVID-19 may expose children to education and protection risks, and violate child rights. This note informs our humanitarian response to the COVID-19 pandemic and is based on Save the Children's Policy and Procedures on how to make and implement decisions to engage armed actors². The Briefing Note will be updated as the situation evolves.

1. Save the Children's policy and procedures are intended to be context-specific and enable decision-making by those best placed to make the necessary leadership judgements including senior managers at country and regional levels supported by the Centre where necessary. **The SCI policy, procedure and supporting documents help** to identify and make strategic decisions about appropriate coordination and engagement approaches. The procedures help to **analyse the context** and **plan the necessary coordination and engagement**. Support can be sought from colleagues from the Civil Military and ANSA Relations Initiative.
2. In a non-conflict setting, coordination with military and security actors is encouraged, as it is likely to limit negative impacts, while maximising positive effects, on children and their families. Appropriate liaison arrangements should be established to ensure common situational awareness, and to ensure planned activities are not duplicative or contradictory and will not generate potential harm or unintended direct or indirect negative effects.
3. In conflict settings, the use of military assets and cooperation with armed actors must be weighed against potential negative repercussions on the overall response across countries. The lack of preparedness and response planning for pandemics in conflict or complex emergencies settings means that humanitarian civil-military relationships are crucial during such infectious disease outbreaks, especially in conflict or insecure settings with degraded health systems.
4. Appropriate engagement enables Save the Children to communicate to armed actors about our mandate and work, and to:
 - Ensure protection of children, address child rights violations, and secure commitments on goals fulfilling their rights.
 - Negotiate, secure and preserve humanitarian space and access (to enable the provision of multi-sector services and assistance, and protection).

¹ SCI's relations with armed actors includes civil-military relations and relations with armed non-state actors, SCI Civ-Mil & ANSA Policy page 2. In this context we refer to OCHA's use of "military and security actors" meaning "a country's armed forces and its different branches, police forces at national or sub-national levels, Civil Defense organisations that perform security related functions, quasi-military organisations, police units that perform military functions, government militia and foreign military forces from UN and Hybrid Peacekeeping forces and other armed actors that may have a role in the COVID-19 response" OCHA CMCoord 2020 at https://drive.google.com/file/d/1F6YKN8RxCeRF3eVm1uM8FnSISrk_kGf/view

² Save the Children's Policy and Procedures on how to make and implement decisions to engage armed actors are available on OneNet.

- Ensure the safety and security of our staff.
5. **Save the Children’s engagement with armed actors** and the provision of humanitarian assistance **is based on the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence, and complies with applicable laws** including international law, counter-terrorism laws and sanctions.³
 6. Save the Children advocacy towards, and/or dialogue with, armed actors may include **messaging** on the impact of their conduct during COVID-19 related interventions, including around a population’s rights to access health services without fear of the state, military, police or other armed actors.
 7. During responses to this pandemic, humanitarian and military objectives in specific contexts can be at odds with each other. While the objective for us as humanitarians is to save lives and provide humanitarian assistance, the military, may have the objective of containing the outbreak, regardless of individual cost, for the benefit of the wider population. Therefore, it is **critical to liaise effectively with relevant stakeholders**, including transparent and coherent messaging to affected communities so that we respect the do no harm principle and work as conflict-sensitively as possible to minimize any negative consequences of our work.⁴
 8. **Negotiating access and risk assessment.** As set out in the SCI Policy and Procedures, engagement or coordination with a military force or ANSA must be preceded by a documented risk assessment and implications for SCI, partners and beneficiaries. SCI should only aim to reach agreements with armed actors that facilitate, secure and sustain humanitarian access. SCI does not under any circumstance provide financial or material compensation to ANSAs.
 9. **Coordination mechanisms.** Coordination with armed actors is voluntary, but it is best practice based on evidence that coordination is in everyone’s interest. It is suggested that each Country Office ensures full participation in relevant civil-military coordination mechanism, whether at Government, UN Country Team or OCHA/CMCoord level, or relevant WG at inter-cluster level. As an independent humanitarian organization, we can also maintain our own relations with the military, police and armed actors if necessary and appropriate. It may also be necessary to establish relations with relevant civil authorities, to facilitate coordination of operational issues to sustain humanitarian action.
 10. In line with OCHA operational guidance on humanitarian civil-military coordination and appropriate interaction with armed actors, the **primary consideration for engaging with armed actors in relation to the COVID-19 response** is to **analyze the risks and benefits** of the engagement and **identify potential unintended secondary and tertiary effects** to both short- and long-term perceptions **on the overall humanitarian response**. This is particularly true for humanitarian operations in conflict settings.

Militaries and other armed actors may be among the first responders that national authorities task to: **maintain law and order** on land and at sea during instances of lockdown and border closure; provide **engineering support** for emergency construction requirements; provide **logistics** and **transport** of essential goods and services (including medevac); provide **health care and**

³ See point 8 in the SCI Civ-Mil & ANSA Policy, page 3

⁴ See point 10 in the SCI Civ-Mil & ANSA Policy, page 4

medical support to national authorities through personnel, medical equipment and facilities; establish **communications**; and conduct **aerial assessments** of population movements in contained areas, amongst other traditional and non-traditional roles in support of national authorities.

11. **Use of military or civilian defense/protection assets (MCDA).** At the country level in a humanitarian operations context, **the Resident Coordinator or the Humanitarian Coordinator is responsible for requests for Military and Civilian Defense Assets (MCDAs).** As per the Oslo Guidelines⁵, military assets, the **decision to request or accept** the use of military assets or armed escorts **must be based only on humanitarian criteria: Only in exceptional cases, limited in scale and time and only when there are no other civilian options** - and this has been assessed as **a last resort**, and to **not generate longer term second or third order negative consequences.**
 12. **Joint civil-military operations.** This mode of working may take place **only under extreme circumstances, outside a conflict setting.** It may only be possible where the goals are common with agreed protection and support strategies abiding to the humanitarian principles. It may become relevant in very specific contexts where the military are first responders, have assets and skilled human resources and form part of the Government Disaster Management Committee, or similar mechanisms in relation to infectious disease outbreaks. In a conflict setting, while it is essential that SCI participate in civil-military coordination meetings, our activities must continue to fall outside the scope of any military integration to maintain our independence and neutrality.
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⁵ [https://www.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/Oslo%20Guidelines%20ENGLISH%20\(November%202007\).pdf](https://www.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/Oslo%20Guidelines%20ENGLISH%20(November%202007).pdf)