

# Reimagining a Better Future for Children

A joint learning and action initiative to strengthen protection and care

Child Protection Reference Group – a working group of HDPI, Inc.

## Scope of Work for Phase Two – *DRAFT February 2026*

### 1. Background and rationale

Phase Two builds on the strategic inquiry undertaken during Phase One of the *Reimagining a Better Future for Children* initiative. Phase One generated emerging insights through structured dialogue across global and regional policy, practice and research communities.

Phase Two responds to a shared assessment that the protection and care of children are under growing threat, shaped by financial retrenchment, institutional fragmentation, and increasing political and humanitarian pressures. These pressures affect how obligations and responsibilities for protecting and supporting children are shared across state authorities, community organisations, NGOs and civil society, with direct consequences for children, families and communities.

Phase Two moves beyond global dialogue to deepen understanding of how protection and care operate in practice at national and sub-national levels. It focuses on how constraints are managed and how countries are responding and adapting within political, fiscal and institutional limits.

This will be achieved through continued structured dialogue and engagement, focused national-level inquiry, and a collective convening process to consolidate learning.

Phase Two forms part of a three-phase process. It builds directly on Phase One and prepares the ground for Phase Three, which will focus on consolidation, advocacy and future directions.

Phase Two will run from January to July 2026, with synthesis occurring at defined points during implementation. Detailed questions, methods and outputs are set out in separate Terms of Reference and a dedicated methodology note.

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## 2. Purpose of Phase Two

The purpose of Phase Two is to deepen collective understanding of how child protection and care operate in practice at country level, how and why countries are responding and adapting, and what enables more coherent, sustainable and nationally owned approaches.

Phase Two will translate Phase One insights into:

- deeper learning through structured dialogue and engagement
- focused examination of outstanding questions and areas requiring clarification
- practical examination of ideas in context through selected national ‘country lenses’; and
- collective reflection and framing through a culminating convening process.

Phase Two therefore seeks to understand how child protection and care systems are responding and adapting in the context of wider financial, political and institutional pressures affecting the sector.

## 3. Framing and boundaries

For the purposes of this initiative, references to ‘systems’ are analytical rather than programmatic. Phase Two uses the concept of systems to examine how obligations and responsibilities for protection and care are organised, governed and sustained, and how responses and adaptations are shaped by political, fiscal and institutional conditions.

Phase Two is a learning and framing exercise. It does not undertake system assessments, programme design or implementation planning. Its outputs are analytical and relational, intended to strengthen collective understanding and prepare the ground for Phase Three.

## 4. Design logic of Phase Two

Phase Two is structured around three interlinked components: structured dialogue and engagement, national-level inquiry through selected country lenses, and a collective convening process.



Dialogue and engagement are intended to surface lived experience, institutional tensions and contested assumptions. National-level inquiry grounds this learning in specific political and institutional contexts. The convening then consolidates and clarifies emerging insights.

The three components are mutually reinforcing. They provide the analytical and relational foundations for Phase Three.

## **5. Structure of Phase Two**

### **5.1 Convening, dialogue, listening and engagement**

This component continues the structured, convening, dialogue and listening approach initiated in Phase One, with deliberate engagement of locally based stakeholders, including government authorities, national and sub national organisations and community representatives, rather than internationally deployed or externally based stakeholders. It includes explicit attention to equity and inclusion across age, gender, disability and socio-cultural context.

The focus is on learning from those who design, manage and deliver protection and care within national and sub-national systems, informed where possible by the perspectives of children and families. Dialogue will examine how protection and care operate in practice, how constraints are managed, and how responses and adaptations occur within political, fiscal and institutional limits.

Engagement will prioritise small-group dialogues and use existing networks where possible, rather than one-to-one interviews, in order to capture shared patterns and reduce transaction costs. Discussions will explore a limited number of cross-cutting thematic enablers, such as workforce, financing, community foundations, state leadership, social norms and institutional capacity, as entry points for examining system performance and adaptation.

Priorities emerging from dialogue will inform both the selection of countries and the focus of national-level inquiry.

Phase Two is expected to include approximately 15–20 structured dialogues conducted in small groups.

### **5.2 National-level work ('country lenses')**

This component uses selected countries as lenses through which to deepen understanding of the conditions under which protection and care are treated as core societal responsibilities and public services. Approximately 5–10 countries will be engaged for deeper inquiry.

Engagement within each country will combine structured review of existing material with a limited number of targeted discussions with national or sub-national authorities and organisations.

The focus is on examining the enablers, drivers and constraints that shape whether protection and care are embedded within public responsibilities, anchored in national and sub-national stewardship, supported by sustainable financing, and upheld through clear accountability arrangements.

Country-level inquiry will explore how leadership, legitimacy and coherence are built around this agenda in different political, fiscal and institutional contexts, and how responses and adaptation pathways emerge and evolve over time.

Selection will be purposive rather than representative and guided by learning opportunities, diversity of system configurations and the availability of existing analytical or evaluative material. The emphasis will not be on applying external frameworks, but on working with national authorities and organisations to understand how they define, organise and steward their systems, and how protection and care are positioned within broader public responsibilities.

The initiative will act as a facilitator and catalyst rather than a substitute for national processes, supporting nationally owned reflection and analysis.

### **5.3 Convening and collective reflection and action**

This component prepares for and delivers a focused convening process that brings together learning from dialogue and national-level inquiry.

The purpose is to consolidate learning, review interpretations and strengthen shared framing across policy and practice, rather than to present predefined models.

The convening will draw together:

- insights from dialogue and engagement
- observations and lessons from country lenses; and
- reflections on key enabling conditions for system performance and adaptation.

The process will contribute to narrative coherence by clarifying how the child protection and care crisis, system constraints and response pathways are understood. It will prepare material for socialisation and uptake in Phase Three by shaping common analytical reference points rather than seeking full consensus

## **6. Partnerships and alignment**

Phase Two will be implemented by the HDPI Child Protection Reference Group and in dialogue with complementary global, regional and national initiatives focused on child protection and care.

This includes continued engagement with participants and partners involved in earlier phases of the initiative, as well as alignment with related efforts such as the UK Government's Global Charter on Care Reform and the ISPCAN Rise Up Policy Forum and other global initiatives addressing child protection, care and care reform.

Organisations and institutions engaged to date include the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, Better Care Network, Child Helpline International, Coram International, ECPAT International, Family for Every Child, Georgetown University's Children in Adversity Project, the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance, the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, Maestral International, Oak Foundation, the Office of the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Representative on Violence Against Children,

Save the Children, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, UNICEF offices, the World Childhood Foundation, the World Health Organization, World Vision International and independent experts and researchers.

Phase Two is intended to complement, rather than duplicate, these efforts, contributing analytical learning that strengthens coherence across policy, practice and research communities.