

CWS Work to Include Marginalized and Vulnerable Children in Services and Communities

CWS Technical Unit
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About CWS

Church World Service (CWS) is a faith-based organization transforming communities around the globe through just and sustainable responses to hunger, poverty, displacement, and disaster. Our vision is a world where all have food, voice, and a safe place to call home.

A Vision and Mission Based in Human Rights

Our vision and mission reflect a shared commitment to a full and equal respect for the rights of all individuals, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, social, religious, or other background. This includes prioritizing, and working in partnership with, people who experience social and economic marginalization and discrimination, recognizing that children can often be in the most precarious situations, as they are disproportionately affected by threats and risks. CWS understands that as a society, everyone can play a role in protecting children through a continuum of care (prevention, response, and restoration). In this context, "child" refers to any person under the age of 18.

Children Experience Multiple and Overlapping Threats to Their Protection, Well-Being, and Development

CWS is committed to uphold the inherent dignity and well-being of every child, as stated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child¹, and to work towards creating an environment in which their rights are respected, protected, and fulfilled.

Many children experience increased vulnerability due to exclusion and discrimination that lead to challenges in accessing their rights to services, education, participation, and basic human needs such as shelter, food, and water. These challenges have serious implications for children's development, well-being, and futures, and for the intergenerational transmission of poverty and other adversities.

Understanding the need for a systemic response to address this, CWS works with communities, authorities, families, and other groups to ensure that children in vulnerable situations are included, elevating their agency, and promoting their access to the resources, services, and supportive caregiving and community environments that can help them stay on a positive developmental path, stay safe and protected, and participate in society.

CWS Contributes to the Protection of Children in the Most Vulnerable and Marginalized Situations

CWS acknowledges the importance of the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action's "Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action."³ These

Nearly 1.2 billion children – almost double the number in 2019 – now live in countries with complex emergencies driven by inequality and fragility.

Around 500 million children currently live in areas with high or very high risk of flooding, nearly 160 million live in areas of extreme or high risk of drought, and by 2040, one in four children will live amid extreme water stress.

Almost half of all children in developing countries suffer at least one severe material deprivation, and only 35 per cent of children globally receive social protection.

UNICEF's 2022-2025 Strategic Plan²

principles are based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Sphere Handbook (2018), and specific references from the Alliance, including:

1. Survival and development
2. Non-discrimination and inclusion
3. Children's participation
4. The best interest of the child
5. Enhance people's safety, dignity and rights and avoid exposing them to further harm
6. Ensure people's access to impartial assistance according to need and without discrimination
7. Assist people to recover from the physical and psychological effects of threats or actual violence, coercion, or deliberate deprivation
8. Help people to claim their rights
9. Strengthen child protection systems
10. Strengthen children's resilience in humanitarian action

¹ <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention#learn>

²United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF Strategic Plan 2022–2025 (New York: UNICEF, 2022), <https://www.unicef.org/reports/unicef-strategic-plan-2022-2025>.

³The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, Minimum standards for child protection in humanitarian action (New York: The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2019), https://alliancecpha.org/en/CPMS_home.

CWS follows a right-based approach when working toward inclusion of children in vulnerable and marginalized situations. Some of its programming strategies include:

- Safe spaces
- Advocacy
- Networking
- Community organizing
- Participation and empowerment
- Access to services
- Case management
- Mobile programming

Under the guidance of these principles, CWS works with children facing protection risks, including those who are refugees, internally displaced, or in other migration context, unaccompanied and separated children (UASC), as well as children from diverse marginalized communities who face stigma and discrimination, including children from Roma communities and children with incarcerated parents or caregivers.

The following programs represent some of CWS's work in mainstreaming these principles and our commitment to child protection and ensuring that children live to their fullest potential.

Connecting Roma Children to Education and Other Services/ Support in Belgrade, Serbia

In Belgrade, Serbia, most of the children engaged in street-related potentially harmful activities such as begging, working at traffic intersections, or helping their families collect and resell recyclables are Roma, members of the historically marginalized ethnic minority. Facing discrimination and social exclusion, Roma children are more likely than other children to be born underweight and lack birth registration and documentation that facilitates access to social services. They are less likely to participate in and complete primary school or attend high school.³ They face poverty, parents' lack of adequate work, a lack of social protection, and limited efforts to ensure children attend school. These act as push factors toward the street,

where they are exposed to threats to their well-being including labor and sexual exploitation, trafficking, failure to attend school, substance abuse, disease, and inadequate nutrition (especially access to a healthy diet).

For over ten years, CWS has partnered with the NGO Center for Youth Integration (CYI) to support drop-in shelters for about 350 street-connected Roma children ages 5-15 in Belgrade. These shelters offer daytime protection support including a safe space, meals, showers, clean clothes, and healthcare. They also support children's well-being and development through psychosocial support, play, cultural, and sports activities, along with learning assistance. The drop-

in shelters connect families with state education, social support, and health systems, and accompany them when they need more support. Also, CWS has worked with CYI to help Roma families enroll their children in preschool and first grade and provide school materials and supplies, clothes, snacks, accompaniment, and classroom support to keep them attending and learning. CYI staff meets regularly with parents to support their commitment and solve problems. CWS and our partners advocate for improved access to services and the development of comprehensive, long-term strategies aimed at protecting the rights of children in street situations.

³"Roma Children," UNICEF Europe and Central Asia, accessed April 10, 2023, <https://www.unicef.org/eca/what-we-do/ending-child-poverty/roma-children>.

Surfacing and Addressing Challenges Faced by Children with Incarcerated Parents and Advocating for Law and Policy Reform in Latin America and the Caribbean

The International Coalition for Children with Incarcerated Parents estimates that over 1% of children globally have a parent currently in prison.⁴ An estimated 2.3 million of these children live in Latin America and the Caribbean; almost half of them in Mexico and Brazil. These children experience, in general, greater poverty and food insecurity than their peers, and encounter greater barriers to education, healthcare, and mental health services. They also experience shame, stigma, and trauma resulting from a parent or caregivers' incarceration.

For over a decade, CWS and an expanding group of Latin American non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have sought to document, understand, and address this situation so that they may fulfill their rights, access protection and opportunities to reach their full potential. CWS has provided financial, technical, and advocacy resources to support innovative and original research related to these children and their families, built a movement, enabled support and services, and promoted and facilitated policy change. Some key outcomes of this collaborative work include:

- New studies on the effects of parental incarceration on children and families and the lack of coordination between the child protection and justice systems (*Invisible No More: Children of Incarcerated Parents in Latin America and the Caribbean*⁵) and the impact of drug policy on children with incarcerated parents in Latin America and the Caribbean (*Childhood that Matters: The Impact of Drug Policy on Children of Incarcerated Parents in Latin America and the Caribbean*⁶).

- Creation of *Plataforma NNAPES*, a regional platform for children and their families and other actors committed to advancing this cause.
- Education, support, and mobilization of faith-based communities and groups in twelve countries to understand parental incarceration as an adverse childhood experience and make services and programs inclusive of children with incarcerated parents.
- Development of a seven-week, asynchronous virtual training for state and civil society actors to increase knowledge about challenges faced by children with incarcerated parents and identifying actions to protect their rights.
- Passage of legislation in Colombia allowing women heads of household, who are in vulnerable circumstances convicted of minor crimes, to have public service substituted for incarceration so that they can continue to care for their families.
- Tailored evidence-based advocacy and programmatic responses to address the specific needs and barriers faced by women and girls impacted by male incarceration.

⁴"Statistics," International Coalition for Children with Incarcerated Parents., accessed May 19, 2023, <https://inccip.org/statistics/>.

⁵Enrique Saavedra, Paula Lappado, Matilde Bango, Federico Mello. *Invisible No More: Children of Incarcerated Parents in Latin American and the Caribbean* (Motevideo: Gurises Unidos, 2013).

⁶Corina Giacomello, *Childhood that Matters: The Impact of Drug Policy on Children of Incarcerated Parents in Latin America and the Caribbean* – 1st edition (Buenos Aires: CWS Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2019).



Belgrade, Serbia 2023

Reducing Barriers to Girls' Education in Rural Kenya

West Pokot County is a historically marginalized, nomadic pastoralist area in northwest Kenya with usually low, but improving, school enrollment and high dropout rates (particularly female students);⁷ poor infrastructure development (including education infrastructure); widespread poverty; and low parental capacity to protect children from physical and sexual violence, abuse, exploitation, and harmful gender norms and practices, including female genital mutilation and early marriage.⁸

CWS partners with local NGO Yangat to increase education opportunities for girls and boys and reduce barriers to girls' participation in education. These barriers can include lack of safe and affordable shelter for girls who live far from school, and lack of private, safe, and clean toilet facilities. CWS and Yangat work with communities, local government, and other actors to agree on priorities and identify local support. Project activities include community-supervised construction of latrines, classrooms, and dormitories to facilitate girls' access and safety; life skills activities through student clubs; and voluntary after school child-driven recreation activities that help bolster student talent and provide safe spaces for children to voice their concerns. CWS works with the Kenyan Ministry of Education to coordinate educational sessions on child protection and to empower community leadership through information on service and support referral pathways for children who have experienced sexual and gender-based violence.

⁷The Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis, Child Sensitive Planning and Budgeting: West Pokot County Brief, Policy Brief No. 56/2018-2019 (Nairobi: KIPPRA), <https://repository.kippira.or.ke/bitstream/handle/123456789/2288/child-sensitive-planning-and-budgeting-west-pokot-county-brief-pb-56-2018-2019.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

⁸Year 2020 national crime data show higher rates of gender-based violence, defilement, and child abuse in the county than the national average. "West Pokot," National Crime Research Centre, accessed April 10, 2023, <https://www.crimeresearch.go.ke/west-pokot-2/>.

Unaccompanied Migrant Children in the United States

In the United States, CWS implements a program serving Unaccompanied Children (UC) managed by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), an operational division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Another federal agency, usually the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), refers unaccompanied children to ORR. Most children are placed in ORR care because immigration authorities apprehended them trying to cross the border, while others are referred after coming to the attention of immigration authorities at some point after crossing the border.

In FY 2022, approximately 72% of all children referred were over 14 years of age, and 64% were boys. The breakdown of countries of origin for youth in this program were approximately: Guatemala (47%), Honduras (29%), El Salvador (13%), and other (11%). As soon as children enter ORR care, they are put in contact with their parents, guardians, or relatives (if known), and the process of finding a suitable sponsor begins. Most sponsors are a parent or a close family relative living in the United States. While ORR programs are looking for sponsors, children are provided age-appropriate care and wraparound

services in one of the 296 ORR-funded facilities and programs in 27 states.⁹

The CWS Home Study and Post Release Services program ensures not only safe placement, case management, and community connection, but focuses on the quality of care and the reduction of trauma for children after transitioning into a new home in the United States. CWS promotes the safety and well-being of unaccompanied children as they reunify with their families across the United States. CWS's approach to care is through a child-centric, culturally responsive, and trauma-informed lens, with the goal of providing meaningful support to the children and families we walk alongside.

In 2022, CWS assisted almost 3,500 children affected by family separation from 28 unique countries of origin, of which 50% were Guatemalan youth (many indigenous). CWS embraces cultural humility in the services we provide to all children, especially those who might face additional challenges like indigenous language speakers. CWS's vision is that unaccompanied children maintain hope for the future, feel supported by their community, and build resilience.

⁹Health and Human Services Government sites. Unaccompanied Children (UC) Program Fact Sheet. 2023. accessed at <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/uac-program-fact-sheet.pdf>



Miami, 2022

CWS Technical Program Briefs

Describe CWS's approach to a particular technical area or sector and situate it within existing global frameworks, standards, or best practices.

Resources:

For more information, the following documents and pages can be useful:

<https://alliancecpha.org/>

<https://www.refworld.org/docid/5c18d7254.html>

<https://www.end-violence.org/inspire>

<https://data.unicef.org/data-for-action/>

<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/medical-mental-health-needs-unaccompanied-children>

<https://www.unicef.org/reports/four-strategies-improve-community-services-unaccompanied-children-united-states>

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