Working Together to Address Emerging Threats to Children’s Safety

STRATEGIC PLAN 2022-2025
Eleven child-focused development agencies are part of the global ChildFund Alliance network, which helps children and their families overcome poverty and the underlying conditions that prevent children from reaching their full potential.

Together we reach nearly 23 million children and family members in 70 countries. Members work to end violence and exploitation against children; provide expertise in emergencies and disasters to ease the harmful impact on children and their communities; and engage children, families and communities to create lasting change.

Our commitment, resources, innovation, knowledge and expertise serve as a powerful force to transform the lives of children around the world.

Members of ChildFund Alliance

ChildFund Australia
ChildFund Deutschland
ChildFund International
ChildFund Japan
ChildFund Korea
ChildFund New Zealand

Barnfonden (Sweden)
Children Believe (Canada)
Educo (Spain)
Un Enfant par la Main (France)
WeWorld (Italy)
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For more than 80 years the members of ChildFund Alliance, a global network of 11 child rights and development organizations, have helped children overcome poverty and the underlying conditions that prevent them from achieving their full potential.

In fulfillment of our last strategic plan, our members worked tirelessly to end violence against children; provide expertise in emergencies and disasters to ease the harmful impact on children and their communities; and to elevate the voices of children and youth to create lasting change. Operating in 70 countries, we reach more than 23 million children and their families.

At a time when the world’s most vulnerable populations were devastated by the impacts of a global health pandemic, we leveraged our collective strength to rapidly help those most in need.

At the outbreak of the crisis, ChildFund members quickly adopted a one-year COVID-19 Response Plan. The plan outlined our shared commitment to provide urgent support in the wake of significant deprivation resulting from the deadly virus that has killed more than five and a half million people worldwide.

As part of our response, ChildFund members united in our first-ever joint fundraising appeal to address the impacts of the pandemic in countries where we operate.

Together, we exceeded our goals for the first year of the pandemic, raising more than USD$100 million and reaching 6.8 million children and their families with much needed provisions and resources.

Unfortunately, COVID-19 continues to disrupt global progress for children, with millions missing out on basic healthcare, protection services, and education.

But while we have experienced dark times these past years, I’ve also been heartened by the extraordinary collaboration and partnerships I have witnessed as organizations, communities, and individuals joined together to combat this deadly pandemic and provide supplies, cash assistance, and care for others.

As we embark on the start of a new four-year strategic plan for years 2022-2025, I look forward to strengthening our shared resolve to ensure children are guaranteed their rights and can live a life free from violence and poverty.

Thank you to all who play a vital role in ensuring that this important work continues.

Simon Whyte
Chairman, Board of Directors

1 https://childfundalliance.org/our-work/strategic-priorities/strategic-plan
3 https://covid19.who.int/
The growing economic uncertainty since the outbreak of COVID-19 has resulted in numerous negative impacts for many of the world’s most vulnerable people including children and young people.

The crisis has increased threats of violence against them, spiked the use of child labor, and has gravely limited their access to education, among many other troubling outcomes. These global consequences have been devastating and far reaching, and have reinforced ChildFund’s belief in the importance of unity in our endeavors.

As we embark on our new four-year strategic plan for the Alliance, our members reassert our long-standing commitment to ending violence against children (EVAC), which was our topline priority in our strategic plan for fiscal years 2016-2021. This commitment included improving our capacity for child protection in humanitarian emergencies, and supporting children’s efforts to meaningfully participate and hold governments and authorities accountable to their commitments.

Our goal is to now build on our past advocacy work by tackling new and evolving risks that are currently affecting millions of children, and which will likely affect exponentially more children in the future if left unaddressed. Above all else, as the world experiences emerging threats we need a strengthened focus on child protection, their rights, and their well-being more than ever before.

To accomplish this, ChildFund Alliance’s new strategic plan for fiscal years 2022-2025 focuses on three priorities: Addressing Emerging Threats to Children’s Safety; Working Together as One; and Building Partnerships for Sustainable Impact and Growth.

As part of our work to address our first strategic priority—emerging threats to children’s safety—ChildFund Alliance will examine the rise in risks to children online. This will require a balance between mitigating the mounting dangers they face in an ever more connected world while simultaneously supporting and empowering children to benefit from opportunities in a digital environment.

We will undertake this work while also advancing our commitment to working in unity with one another; strengthening existing relationships with those who share our mission; and building new partnerships that can lead to better outcomes for children and young people worldwide.

We need a strengthened focus on child protection, their rights, and their well-being more than ever before.

Nelson Mandela once said, “The true character of a society is revealed in how it treats its children.” We invite you to join us as we work with societies, leaders, and stakeholders to prioritize the treatment of children and help make the world a safer and more rewarding place for young people across the globe.

Together, we can achieve far greater outcomes and help many more children in need than we can alone.

Meg Gardinier
Secretary General
Vision
A world in which all children enjoy their rights and achieve their full potential.

Mission
Together with children, we create sustainable solutions that protect and advance their rights and well-being.

Principles
Working together as one to better help children and their families.
STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1: Protecting Children from Emerging Threats

Strengthen our long-standing commitment to end violence against children and positively impact their lives by tackling threats that are projected to significantly impact them in the future.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2: Working Together as One

Operate according to eight principles that inspire us, keep us aligned, and guide our collective decision making to better tackle the challenges facing children and young people today.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3: Building Partnerships for Sustainable Impact & Growth

Develop increased cooperative efforts across the Alliance to create new, long-term partnerships with those who share our determination to create a safer future for children.
The right of children to protection from violence is enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, yet one billion children still experience some form of emotional, physical or sexual violence every year; and one child dies from violence every seven minutes.4

The human, social and economic costs of denying children’s rights to protection are enormous—estimated to be as high as seven trillion dollars or roughly eight percent of global GDP annually.5 These costs are both unacceptable and avoidable.

In Toward a Safe World for Children6, ChildFund Alliance’s strategic plan for 2016-2021, our members made a commitment to do all we can to protect children from violence and exploitation as part of our work related to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The 17 SDGs agreed to by world leaders in 2015 are intended to create a better world by 2030.7 Under the umbrella of our EVAC work, ChildFund Alliance played a key role in securing SDG target 16.2 calling to “end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children.”

In our new four-year strategic plan, Working Together to Address Emerging Threats to Children’s Safety, we reassert our longstanding commitment to ending violence against children as called for in target 16.2.

Our goal is to build upon our previous work focused on achieving the SDGs that are key to children’s rights and safety.

In doing so, we will build upon our expertise in EVAC, our efforts directed at the meaningful participation of children and young people, and our programs aimed at supporting children and communities before, during, and after a humanitarian crisis (see pg. 10).

Our work over the next four years will focus on ensuring the safety of children from new and emerging threats, beginning with risks that are emerging in the digital environment including sexual violence.

Studies conducted in a range of diverse geographies (from Rwanda, to India, to the Philippines) have all indicated that increased access, lack of safeguards, and low awareness of risks amongst children and their caregivers make children particularly vulnerable to online threats.8

In Australia, a recent study by eSafety—the world’s first government agency charged with keeping citizens safe online—found one in four young people have been contacted by someone they don’t know online.9 A very real danger is that the person who made the contact is a sexual predator who will groom a child with the intent to sexually abuse them. They might trick or persuade the child to send or post sexual images or to watch adult or sexual content.
Further, location-sharing within apps, games or social media accounts can reveal a child’s physical location.

Research undertaken by UNICEF has found that risks to children online vary greatly by country. Further, the extent of harm caused depends on many factors, such as children’s resilience, parental guidance and support, and a child’s level of digital skills (e.g., knowledge of and ability to manage privacy settings).  

With this in mind, ChildFund Alliance will commit new resources, strengthen existing programs (see Swipe Safe pg. 14), and develop new efforts, with a goal of measurably contributing to the reduction of emerging threats to children online.

At all times, we will strive to build upon the strengths of the children and the young people we serve by working with them to bring about positive and impactful change.

Of all the unspeakable damages suffered by our children, violence is surely the worst.

– Mrs Graca Machel, Chair of the African Child Policy Forum (ACPF) International Board of Trustees
More than 1.5 billion people have been affected by disasters; with women, children and vulnerable individuals among those who are disproportionately affected.\(^\text{11}\) Under the umbrella of EVAC, the Alliance’s previous strategic plan (FY 2016-21) called for an increase in our members’ capacity to provide child protection in emergencies (CPiE) and disaster risk reduction (DRR).

Specifically, Alliance members focused on addressing the physical, psychological and emotional health of children before, during and after disasters as well as mainstreaming DRR into ongoing programming.

The need to anticipate, plan for and reduce disaster risks to protect people, their communities, and their livelihoods is urgent. DRR reduces vulnerability, strengthens resilience, and is essential to protecting and supporting children. This is all the more important as the world’s humanitarian crises are compounded by increases in global health pandemics, armed conflict and violence, political instability, and severe weather events. Such crises are threatening to undo decades of progress towards achieving a more sustainable future for all.

These impacts are felt most deeply by children, hindering their healthy development and well-being. A disaster can change a child’s life in a matter of minutes and wipe away the positive impacts that took development programs years to achieve.

In humanitarian crises such as floods, earthquakes, conflicts, or pandemics, our goal is to address the effects of disasters, and reduce and mitigate disaster risks for children. We achieve this through the provision of safe spaces, strengthening child protection
systems, providing food and life saving services, and through collaboration with groups such as the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action.

As we work to advance our new strategic priorities for fiscal years 2022-2025, we will continue to undertake efforts aimed at reducing vulnerability and strengthening resilience at all levels. This includes building upon our work to ensure children’s right to participate.

As acknowledged in the CRC, governments are responsible for ensuring children’s right to survival, protection, development and participation. Further, children must be able to hold governments accountable to their commitments and contribute to finding constructive ways to solve problems. However, in most countries, children have no voice, no platform and are not meaningfully engaged in decisions that affect them.

Supporting children’s participation has been a key aspect of ChildFund Alliance’s work over the past five years. To meet this goal, we developed the Child-friendly Accountability Initiative. The program uses a specially designed methodology to enable children to hold decision-makers accountable to eradicating all forms of violence against children (SDG target 16.2). The initiative has given children a voice by providing a platform for them to identify problems and solutions through informed dialogue with decision-makers about issues of concern to them.

Six ChildFund Alliance members implemented the program’s methodology in 11 countries. To date, an estimated 9,500 children in 223 project locations have been trained across the Alliance. As participants of Child-friendly Accountability, children recorded radio and television shows on their rights; worked with authorities to sign commitments to uphold their rights; reported and diverted incidences of child marriages; and participated in global events such as the High-level Political Forum at the United Nations.

The ability for children to use their voice is paramount given that attacks on children are increasing as accountability decreases. Grave violations committed against children for example in situations of armed conflict have increased to “alarmingly high” rates.

The need to anticipate, plan for and reduce disaster risks to protect people, their communities, and their livelihoods is urgent.

Meanwhile, the frameworks and mechanisms used to promote accountability and justice for children, in compliance with international laws, are being increasingly politicized, weakening their effectiveness as tools to prevent rights violations and hold perpetrators accountable.

As we embark on our new strategic priorities, we will continue with our efforts to ensure greater accountability to children, including greater recognition of their right to be heard, to be meaningfully engaged, and to be empowered to participate and contribute to decisions that affect them.

11 https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/frameworks/sendaiframework
15 www.unicef.org/protection/violence-against-children
The number of children participating in the online environment is increasing rapidly. More than 175,000 additional children go online for the first time each day across the globe, with the majority gaining access through mobile phones. The number of children participating in the online environment is increasing rapidly. More than 175,000 additional children go online for the first time each day across the globe, with the majority gaining access through mobile phones. 16

Children leverage digital technology to socialize, communicate, learn, and play, all of which are essential to their well-being and development. Yet, these same technologies leave children vulnerable to significant risks—from discrimination and hate speech, to cyberbullying, and privacy invasions.

Experts globally point to an alarming increase in online child sexual exploitation and abuse during the COVID-19 pandemic, with children even more vulnerable to such threats due to increased social isolation and unstructured time online.

Currently, legislation to address the issue of child exploitation and abuse exists, but it is often fragmented or does not cover the online incidence of this troubling phenomenon. Further, enforcement of existing laws is uneven at best. The International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol) reports that in a law enforcement survey across 39 countries, eight in ten police officers reported an increase since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic of perpetrators attempting to contact children online.

According to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, online sexual exploitation most commonly occurs via phone and tablet messaging apps, social networking sites, and video chats. NCMEC’s Cyber Tipline reviewed 21.7 million sexual abuse materials in 2020, up from 16.9 million in 2019—an increase of 28%. 17

While available data on the prevalence of online sexual exploitation and abuse of children has gaps, particularly in the Global South, it is clear that the danger to children is global. Consider that in Cameroon, the Gambia, Kenya, Togo and Uganda, more than 50 percent of children report having seen someone their age in child sexual abuse material online. 18

Although risks are real, and on the rise, so too are the opportunities presented to children through their engagement in the digital world. Children express a strong desire for affordable, accessible and reliable access to connectivity. They also stress the importance of accompanying efforts to ensure their safety and privacy in the online environment as this is becoming as much a part of children’s daily lives as their experiences at home, in school, and in their local communities.

Our goal is to leverage our expertise across our membership to address these increasing threats to children’s safety online, while also helping children become effective digital citizens by improving their ability to use technology safely and responsibly.

As part of our work toward worldwide action to protect and empower children in the digital domain, we have identified two primary outcomes for an Online Safety Campaign (see next page).
Outcome 1: Laws and policies to protect children from online child sexual exploitation and abuse are strengthened.

We seek to address gaps in international and regional legislation and policymaking to increase children’s online safety. We will build on recent advances such as the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment 25 on children’s rights in relation to the digital environment and the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) updated Guidelines on Child Online Protection COP. Where laws do exist, we will seek to address weaknesses in implementation and enforcement.

Outcome 2: Children are effective digital citizens and are equipped to participate in online civic engagement safely, ethically, and responsibly as part of their healthy development.

We recognize that empowering children’s participation in society cannot be achieved without empowering children and young people to become active digital citizens. All children must be ensured affordable and reliable access. They also must be equipped with a full portfolio of skills and knowledge to help them avoid online risks, maximize online opportunities, and exercise their rights in the online world. This is essential to active citizenship, both on and offline.
The worldwide web brings new opportunities for young people to learn, connect, and mobilize, but it also introduces new threats to their safety and well-being. In developing countries, these risks are amplified due to a lack of resources, education frameworks, and governance systems.

Whereas children in industrialized countries have been able to adapt gradually to technology, many children in less developed countries have had a much more rapid introduction to the internet. For example, in many of the communities where ChildFund is working, families have gone from limited or no knowledge of the internet a few years ago to connecting via smartphones across numerous platforms.

In Vietnam in Southeast Asia, a country of more than 96 million people, internet capacity is now at more than 70 percent, with nearly 70 million people active online. This includes 65 million social media users, with an estimated one-third of Facebook accounts belonging to young people aged 15 to 24.

In response to the increased connectivity in the country, in 2017 ChildFund Australia launched Swipe Safe. The project aimed at preventing the online abuse and exploitation of children and teaching them core competencies to be safe online.

In its first phase, the innovative program has helped more than 12,000 children navigate the digital environment more safely. Swipe Safe educates young people on potential risks such as cyber scams, bullying or sexual abuse, and offers strategies to protect themselves.

The program works with schools to create safe learning environments and mobilizes parents, youth, schools and the private sector to play an active role in strengthening children’s online safety.

For example, it provides training for parents and internet café and game shop owners to identify and address possible online risks for children. It also supports schools to coordinate school-based trainings for children and to develop and promote online safety policies and guidelines.

A key innovation of the program is that it engages young volunteers with extensive knowledge on technology to train young people and others on online safety. These trainers can more directly relate to their peers’ experiences and help keep the curriculum up to date.

Programs such as this are especially timely in Vietnam where there is increasing concern with cyber-bullying. An estimated one out of three students suffers from cyber-bullying in Vietnam according to a survey among middle-school and high-school students released by Hanoi National University in 2018.

A survey of Swipe Safe participants found that after completing the program, 100 percent of young people said they knew at least one method to protect themselves when online. In addition, 85 percent can identify where to go for assistance if they are experiencing issues of concern when interacting online.

The next phase of Swipe Safe aims to ensure that girls and boys in Vietnam are protected from online violence through a strengthened child protection system.

A key innovation of the program is that it engages young volunteers with extensive knowledge on technology to train young people and others on online safety.
Besides continuing to provide online safety education systematically through the education and youth union system, ChildFund will seek to build additional capacities for frontline workers in the area of child online protection.

The ChildFund Swipe Safe curriculum is evidence-based and has been developed based on data from participatory consultations with young people. It is now being adapted to an app format that will be available on and offline and in high- and low-tech settings.
Whether advocating for children or delivering services and programmatic activities, our voice and actions are amplified exponentially when we stand united. Recognizing this, our CEOs and board members identified eight guiding principles designed to build on our lifesaving work for children.

These eight principles inspire us, keep us aligned, and guide our collective decision making so we can achieve increased impact by working together as one.
AS MEMBERS OF CHILDFUND ALLIANCE, WE:

1. **Focus on the rights and safety of children first** – we partner with children, and prioritize their protection from all forms of violence, while elevating their voices and promoting their development, well-being and participation; as evidenced by our collective missions that emphasize inclusivity of all children, their families and their communities.

2. **Commit to transparency and responsiveness in our work** with each other, and with others; as evidenced by all members conforming with independently audited shared standards, policies and codes of conduct, and accountability to those we serve, our donors, and stakeholders.

3. **Leverage our global network** to tackle the challenges facing children today; as evidenced by advocating for and with children at family, local, national, and global levels, and we work towards building a world that is safe for children.

4. **Respect and listen to our staff and implementing partners**, embracing the knowledge gained through diversity; as evidenced by empowering people to make and own decisions so they can more effectively and efficiently deliver impact to children.

5. **Grow through experimentation and learning**, as evidenced by sharing our best practices, lessons learned, and insights from evidenced-based programs through inter-member working groups.

6. **Respect individual identity**, and over and above this, we see our combined greater strength when working together as one, as evidenced by honoring consistent messaging and brand guidelines for ChildFund.

7. **Care deeply for the earth** and how its health impacts children and future generations, as evidenced by programs and shared standards that care for the environment and mitigate against harm.

8. **Drive collaboration** over purely independent operating models, as evidenced by increasing bilateral and multilateral initiatives amongst members.
Strategic Priority 3: Building Partnerships for Sustainable Impact & Growth

Through our third strategic priority, ChildFund aims to develop increased cooperative efforts across the Alliance and with external partners. This priority reflects our conviction that strong partnerships and sound financial health are essential to strengthen our efforts to ensure children enjoy their rights and achieve their full potential.

WE AIM TO:

• Engage and collaborate with public and private sector entities that share or support our values and goals to achieve maximum impact for children in alignment with our mission to create a safer future for children.

• Seek efforts that increase and maximize resources for programs focused on addressing emerging threats to children’s safety.

Moving Forward

ChildFund’s ambition for the next four years is to contribute to a safer future for children by addressing emerging and increasing threats to children’s safety such as online safety.

We recognize, however, that there are many other forms of emerging threats, such as those resulting from an escalation in extreme weather events, increasingly violent armed conflicts, and new and mutating infectious diseases. These threats put millions more children at risk of long-lasting harm. For example, as the world grapples with dramatic increases in environmental-related emergencies, risks to children rise as the protective factors and resilience that families, communities, and national systems rely on to ensure the protection and well-being of populations erode.22

Also, with armed conflicts rising for the ninth straight year, millions more children are being forcibly displaced. These emerging risks threaten household income, food security, and children’s healthy development and survival.

They can lead to an increase in violence against children, such as child labor, child marriage, sexual abuse, physical abuse and gender-based violence, neglect, and trafficking.

There is much to do to support local action and local actors to manage and reduce the risks to children. Our goal is to conduct further research on perils that are putting children in harm’s way, and undertake a second campaign that aligns with our mission of creating sustainable solutions that protect and advance children’s rights and well-being.

By leveraging our collective strength, ChildFund Alliance will continue to provide a voice with and for children, to highlight the issues children care about, and to mobilize effectively to address threats to their lives, safety and well-being.

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How We Work

ChildFund Alliance members create sustainable, child-focused development programs in areas where children are impacted by violence, conflict, natural disasters and emergencies, poverty, and global health issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Programs address children’s safety, their right to live a life free from violence and discrimination, their right to participate, their right to have access to education, nutritious food and clean water, and to emergency response and psychosocial interventions, among other rights outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

ChildFund works in partnership with local communities and the participation of children themselves is a key component of our approach.

The ChildFund Alliance Secretariat develops and works with ChildFund members to implement Alliance-wide strategy, standards and policies, and also represents members at international forums such as the United Nations and the European Union.

Photo Captions

All images within report provided courtesy of ChildFund Alliance members.

Cover image: 6 year old Gilo is recovering from malnourishment following a devastating drought in Marsabit County, Kenya where she and her family receive food assistance through ChildFund programming @Jake Lyell

Page 3: A young child in Papua New Guinea @Jocelyn Pederick

Page 4: Sonepet, age 15, Laos @ChildFund Laos

Page 5: Dube, age 6, Kenya @Jake Lyell

Page 6: Felista, age 8, Zambia @Jake Lyell

Page 9: Yeimi, age 10, at her home in Honduras @Kyle LaFerriere

Page 10: A group of children play together at their school in Cochabamba, Bolivia @Daytona Lee Niles

Page 11: Louise, age 5, lives with her mother and 7 others in a squatter settlement in Manila, Philippines. Her mother attends ChildFund risk reduction classes to learn what to do when a disaster strikes. @Jake Lyell

Page 12: Anthony, age 16, uses a tablet in a solar-powered lab at his school in Kenya @Jake Lyell

Page 13: Brothers Yimy, age 10, Jayron, age 12, and Jhider, age 8, watch an educational video with a ChildFund partner coordinator outside their home in Huehuetenango, Guatemala @Jake Lyell

Page 15: Du, a young boy in Vietnam works on a computer donated by ChildFund sponsors @ChildFund Australia

Page 16: Dorica, age 6, plays with her peers in Zambia @Jake Lyell

Page 18: Joining Forces partners gather with children at the United Nations for the release of A Second Revolution: 30 years of child rights, and the unfinished agenda @Lisa MacSpadden

Page 18: Hira, age 10, attends school in Odisha, India. Her teacher received ChildFund training on keeping classrooms safe for children @Daytona Lee Niles

Back cover: Jasmin, age 4, holds a medicinal plant near her home in Huehuetenango, Guatemala that her family received through ChildFund @Jake Lyell
Every child deserves to live a life free from violence.

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