



Action by Red Cross and  
Red Crescent National Societies

# TO PROTECT AND ASSIST CHILDREN CONNECTED TO THE STREETS

CASE STUDY REPORT

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Cover photo: An Ecuador Red Cross volunteer assists two migrant boys to make a call home to Venezuela.

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# DEFINITION

**Street-connected children** are often also labeled as “street children” or “homeless children” and refers to people under the age of 18 years that:

1. Depend on the streets to live and / or work, either on their own, or with other children or family members; and
2. Have a strong connection to public spaces (e.g., streets, markets, parks, bus or train stations) and for whom the street plays a vital role in their everyday lives and identities. This wider group includes children who do not live or work on the street but regularly accompany other children or family members in the streets.

In other words, street-connected children are children who depend on the streets for their survival—whether they live on the streets, work on the streets, have support networks on the streets, or a combination of the three.<sup>1</sup>

# PURPOSE OF THIS CASE STUDY REPORT

This case study report provides examples of concrete activities and related lessons that may benefit future Red Cross and Red Crescent National Society projects that interact with children connected to the streets.

Rather than being an exhaustive list of the work of National Societies, the case studies provide details of work from a sampling of Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies. Specifically, 18 projects are highlighted and represent action from the Americas, Africa, Asia-Pacific, Europe, and the Middle East and North Africa Regions.

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<sup>1</sup> Consortium for Street Children. (2019). *About Street Children*. [www.streetchildren.org/about-street-children/](http://www.streetchildren.org/about-street-children/)

# GLOBAL BACKGROUND ON CHILDREN CONNECTED TO THE STREETS

There is no clear number of children connected to the streets around the world. This is mainly because these children represent a population that is hard to collect information from, can be mobile, different tools define street-connected children differently, and often street-connected children may be suspicious of sharing information with data collectors.

Children may end up as street connected for many complicated reasons. These include<sup>2</sup>:

- disasters and conflicts;
- poverty;
- discrimination;
- sexual, physical, or emotional abuse and neglect;
- urbanisation;
- HIV / AIDS;
- being forced into criminal activity;
- being rejected from their family for so called “moral” reasons;
- mental health issues;
- substance abuse; and
- sexual orientation or gender identity.

Once connected to the street, the risk for children is serious and significant. These include experiencing violence, abuse, and exploitation; recruitment into gangs and organized crime; suffering mental health issues; becoming addicted to drugs;<sup>3</sup>and having limited access to basic essential healthcare, education, or legal protections.

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<sup>2</sup> Consortium for Street Children. (2019). *About Street Children*. [www.streetchildren.org/about-street-children/](http://www.streetchildren.org/about-street-children/)

<sup>3</sup> Consortium for Street Children. (2019). *About Street Children*. [www.streetchildren.org/about-street-children/](http://www.streetchildren.org/about-street-children/)



# NATIONAL SOCIETY CASE STUDIES







## Australia

### Background

For ten years the Australia Red Cross has managed the “Youth Housing and Reintegration Services (YHARS)” project based in Queensland, Australia.

The YHARS project is a partnership with, and funding from, the Government of Australia Ministry of Child Safety and Youth Justice. The project also partners with local agencies such as real estate organizations and local NGOs including those that support children and young people to rent housing.

### Action

For children and young adults ages 12-22. Mainly population is children ages 14-17. About two-thirds tend to girls. Approximately one-third are Indigenous Australians. A high percentage of the children struggle with mental health challenges.

Australian Red Cross provides several services:

- a) advocacy with local government, police, mental health providers, and other agencies involved with care of children who are homeless to meet the best interest of each child;
- b) case management support to develop plans for stable housing, access key services, purchase essential goods, build life skills, complete paperwork for key documents including birth registration and to open bank accounts, and fill applications for employment and housing;
- c) provide temporary homestays; and
- d) manage a 24-hour cafe for young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

## Results

The project has invested a lot of time and effort into ensuring that it builds trust with children and young people. This has led to the Australia Red Cross being able to understand actual needs and barriers and provide better support to help children and young people access the support they need. This has also resulted in children and young people having greater agency and participating more in the decisions that affect them.

Over the last ten years, each year on average, the project reaches 140 children and young people.

## Learning

Some of the project's key learning include:

1. It is important to have an approach of unwavering positive regard for the children and young people the Australia Red Cross works with. For instance, regardless of the mistakes children and young people might make and even anger they may experience, the Australia Red Cross continues to work with them and to follow-up on actions they have committed to. This is an important way of enhancing trust.
2. A strength-based approach to supporting children is essential. This recognizes that children are the experts about themselves. This also supports a client-led method where children are empowered to make as many decisions as they can for issues that affect them. This understand that they have "growing brains" as they navigate through adolescence where they are no longer young children but not yet adults.
3. It can be difficult but is advantageous to allow children and young people to take some risks, and make choices, including around harmful substances such as drugs. Where a child is determined to take these risks and if trust is built with the service provider then there is a greater chance for risk to be taken in safe places and with support accessible. Having this trust also allows for opportunities to use facts and information to help children make positive and healthy choices.
4. To have effective advocacy, it's crucial to set clear goals, have a plan to achieve the goals, and to be prepared for implementing the plan while anticipating some challenges will arise.
5. There can be more done to support children who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in emergency shelters during disasters. This is an area that can be explored further.





## Britain

### Background

The Young Refugee Service (YRS) works with unaccompanied refugee and asylum-seeking young people aged 15-25, supporting them through the asylum process and social care system as they transition through to adulthood. There are 3 main strands to the service:

- The casework team undertakes a range of duties designed to empower young people aged 15-25, to access their entitlements in the UK and plan for the future. With a focus on holistic support packages, casework provides guidance on questions of immigration and welfare, as well as help to access statutory medical, legal, and educational services. Between May 2020 and April 2021, 165 young people received casework support.
- The 5 peer-led Refugees and Befriending (RnB) projects based across London – Camden, Lewisham, Islington, Hammersmith, and Croydon – meet weekly and aim to build confidence, improve English, and develop life skills through activity-based sessions. The groups are open to young refugees and asylum seekers aged 15-21. These projects provide opportunities to form friendships and widen social networks, learn a variety of practical skills, and nurture talents and interests, helping young people adjust to life in the UK and learn to live independently. Between May 2020 and April 2021, 277 young people accessed these projects.
- The ESOL and Study Club is aimed at young asylum seekers and refugees aged 15-25, in or out of education, looking to improve their English and numeracy skills, and to receive support with their homework through creative ESOL techniques and 1-2-1 support. Between May 2020 and April 2021, 50 young people regularly attended the ESOL club.

## Action

As part of its work with asylum-seeking and refugee children, the British Red Cross supports children when they are temporarily homeless.

A large majority of the children referred to the service are boys. This reflects the reality of boys mainly traveling to the UK as unaccompanied child migrants and refugees. It should be noted though that during the past year, we have seen a significant increase in the number of girls accessing our projects and casework service.

Child migrants can find themselves connected to the streets for a variety of reasons. For example:

- they can fear local authorities and avoid support from them;
- they are victims of child trafficking;
- they feel that the government-imposed accommodation placements are unsafe (e.g., if co-housed with adults or particularly vulnerable young people), inadequate (e.g., unhygienic), isolating, or culturally inappropriate, and they are not being adequately supported to move elsewhere; or
- they have disputed age assessments where local authorities rule they are adults, and attempt to move them into adult accommodation.

In response, the British Red Cross provides multiple services, including:

- advocacy to local government authorities to immediately find safe and adequate shelter for child migrants, and assess their support needs in order to develop effective support plans;
- connecting children to local agencies and resources to access essential basic services such as healthcare, education, clothing, and food/toiletries banks;
- referring children to specialist services such as mental health and anti-trafficking organisations;
- supporting children to understand their rights and entitlements;
- assisting child migrants to access legal representation to challenge decisions against their best interest;
- helping children understand the legal process in child-friendly and culturally appropriate ways, gathering necessary legal documents, and accompanying children to legal appointments;
- applying for financial grants to support children experiencing destitution and help them achieve their future goals;
- connecting children to other refugees and migrants in similar situations and other young people in local communities; and
- in extreme situations, fund temporary shelter for up to several days until a viable alternative solution is found.

## Results

Through this advocacy and support, child migrants who are temporarily homeless are regularly assisted and this has led to finding safe and adequate shelter, reversing age assessment decisions that incorrectly find children to be adults, and helping children access essential basic services.

Among the main challenges has been negotiating with local authorities on roles and duties related to migrant children who are temporarily homeless. Local authorities will often encourage children to return to accommodations where they feel unsafe, and fail to provide emergency interim accommodation whilst further assessments/investigations are ongoing.

The age assessment process is also extremely challenging. When children are assessed to be adults it can pose many risks for them. Most of the time, this results in them being quickly moved from local authorities' care into adult asylum accommodation, often without warning or adequate preparation. They are often not

warranted enough time to legally challenge the age assessment whilst remaining in safe, child-appropriate accommodation. This presents multiple safeguarding issues: children sharing accommodation with adults, or children absconding and becoming homeless due to fear of not being believed/sharing with adults. During COVID-19 young people who have been relying on friends for places to stay and barely making ends meet through low wage, and often illegal work, have found even these supports have been diminished placing them at higher risk of being homeless.

A significant challenge is gaining the trust of child migrants. After experiencing difficult journeys to reach the UK, then navigating through the asylum processes, and not always feeling heard, children often have low trust in the people and systems designed to protect and assist them.

There can be limited local support for migrant and refugee children. Where support is available, the resources might be limited.

It can be challenging because of language barriers, new environments, lack of experience, and self-confidence for children to express their needs and advocate for themselves.

## Learning

1. It is essential to link, as soon as possible, child migrants who are homeless to legal representation. This can help ensure children are properly supported, understand their rights, and can access services sooner.
2. The age assessment process can be very damaging to a child's wellbeing and development. Again, it is essential to have fast access to good legal advice and support when challenging age assessment decisions, and strongly advocate for the child to remain in local authorities' care until all legal proceedings have concluded.
3. Develop strong working relationships and referral processes with relevant statutory and non-statutory services in the local area.
4. Investing time and energy into building trust with child migrants is critical. This can be done through open and regular dialogue, following through on commitments, and explaining clearly in child-friendly terms the processes and decisions that affect them, including when decisions by authorities go against what children had hoped for.
5. It is essential for children's own agency to be recognised and supported. They need to be provided age and culturally appropriate ways to participate in decisions that affect them. This also means that when children want something different than what is being offered or they disagree with what is being provided, they are not seen as 'making trouble' or 'wanting to be homeless' but rather they are exercising their rights to be heard and find approaches that they are comfortable with.

**“ There is no one else I can ask, there is only you guys. You are my family in the UK, the ones who help me**

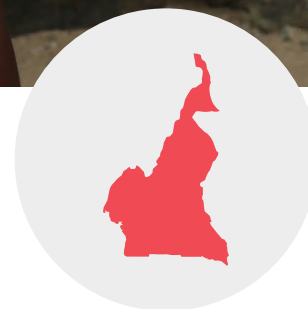
**“ I want to say is best to join RnB because I meet new friends and I am happy when I come.”**

**“ It nice to be able to see people and to have a space to share our feelings and hopes.”**

**“ Big big thanks to you for everything. I hope you have the same happiness that you made us feel.”**

**Child participants of British Red Cross Refugees and Befriending project**





## Cameroon

### Background

Cameroon is home to hundreds of thousands of displaced people affected by local and regional conflicts and crises. For example, the conflict between government and non-state actors in the Lake Chad Basin has resulted in more than 118,000 Nigerian refugees into Cameroon since 2014. In addition, conflict and instability in the Central African Republic has pushed more 300,000 people into Cameroon, especially into the northern, Adamawa and eastern regions.

Economic hardships upon displaced families have worsened the already difficult situation. In addition, maltreatment against children within families remains a problem. A combination of these factors has led to thousands of children living, working, and fending for themselves on the streets.

### Action

A key part of the Cameroon Red Cross assistance to refugees and displaced persons is the delivery of Restoring Family Links services with the technical and financial support of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

As part of its Restoring Family Links, the Cameroon Red Cross places emphasis on tracing services for unaccompanied and separated children, including those connected to the streets. To this end, the Cameroon Red Cross has been conducting outreach with communities across the country. This has involved door-to-door and tent-to-tent campaigns that encourage communities to direct children who have fled crisis to any Cameroon Red Cross office. In addition, it has been working with people in search of family members, including children, to connect with its local offices.



## Results

With the various crises that the country has encountered between 2014 and the present day, more than 300 children have been reunited with their families. More than 1,000 Red Cross messages have also been exchanged. Several dozen video calls allowed family members to re-establish contact with their children.

The main difficulties encountered in the implementation of the Restoring Family Links program have been logistical. In particular, volunteers and staff are required to travel great distances to reach children and their families this includes through areas with limited infrastructure and challenging physical terrain.

Logistical challenges are made worse by the contact need to generate enough funding to the implement the activities.

## Learning

Some of the priority lessons learned have included:

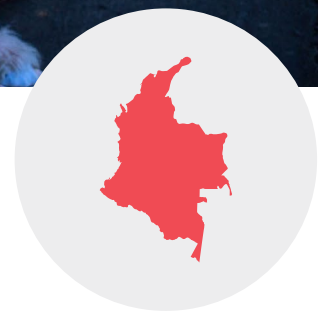
1. Recognizing that there has been success in the locations where there are large displacements today, it is also crucial to build capacity and experience in other parts of the country that are facing similar situations or might face these in the future.
2. The Cameroon Red Cross presence is visible in and well respected which allows for it to reach out effectively and build trusting relationships with children and families.



## Canada

### Snapshot

1. The Canadian Red Cross in the province of Saskatchewan joined an interagency effort to protect and assist people who are homeless and living on the streets.
2. The Canadian Red Cross was able to provide COVID-19 grants for delivery of personal protection equipment (PPE) to people who are homeless and living on the streets.
3. In recent years, during emergencies such as floods and forest fires, the Canadian Red Cross manages mass including for people living on the streets.
4. In parts of the province with children living in disaster prone environments and areas of high poverty, the Canadian Red Cross is taking preventative actions with children through emotional wellness sessions in local schools to enhance children's resilience.
5. The Red Cross conducts outreach to people on the streets and local agencies to identify ways to support such as through the provision of goods and bedding.



# Colombia

## Background

Since 1973 the Colombia Red Cross, through its Youth Department, has conducted programming with children connected to the streets.

The program is named “The prevention and support program for children and young people in high-risk communities” (PANICA).

PANICA involves supporting children living, working, or spending most of their time on the streets. Many of these children have weak bonds with their families, struggle with substance abuse, have experiences violence, abuse, or exploitation, and lack access to basic essential services such as healthcare, mental health and psychosocial support, and education. Some children connected to the streets also work on the streets. Due to a variety of reasons including poverty, disasters, and conflict, it is estimated there are tens of thousands of children connected to the streets in Colombia.

## Action

The PANICA program supports children connected to the streets. Some of the children live with their families and others have left their families, because they do not feel safe with them, and live alone.

PANICA employs a seven stage approach to supporting children:

1. Present the PANICA program to the local community and build trust
2. Build a mutual understanding of risks to children in the community
3. Conduct with the community self-assessment of specific risks for children
4. Support community and families with risks to define a plan of action to improve the well-being of children
5. Help families identify areas they can control and areas they cannot control and possible barriers to their plan of action

6. Support families to implement their plans to improve the protection of children
7. Work with families and communities to find sustainable alternatives for children. This includes improving access to education.

## Results

Over 1,000 families have been reached through the seven stage approach. The implementation of PANICA has led to improvements in protection of children connected to the streets and enhanced relationships between children, families, and communities.

The PANICA project has faced some challenges over the years. These include:

- Few resources available for programming with young people and volunteers makes it hard to appropriately train, support and monitor activities; and
- While PANICA is currently active in 3 sectionals of the 31 sections of the Colombia Red Cross that have youth groups, there are not yet any certified and trained volunteers at the National level, which has made it difficult to access some communities and implement strategies.

## Learning

Focusing on identification of specific local and regional risks to children is important to craft culturally and child-specific solutions.

It is essential to see the child within a network of relationships and support systems and then to help a child through these relationships. As such, PANICA focuses on individual children, their families, and local communities.

Building trust with children, families and communities is a key part of being able to provide support and help identify solutions to improve the protection of children.

By taking a preventative approach that focuses on helping to improve the relationships and communication in families, the risk of children becoming connected to the streets is reduced.

Supporting at risk children to access education can be a crucial way to limit the risk of children becoming connected to the streets.

The program has been a benefit not only to children and families at risk but also to the Colombia Red Cross volunteers involved in the project through exposure to new social situations and opportunities for growing their social skills.

Over the past decades the program has regularly adapted and added new components, based on monitoring, and learning reviews, to better meet the needs of children, families, and communities

**“ The important thing is to be able to contribute to the social transformation of children and young people with small actions, workshops, activities words that really generate impact and contribute to the reconstruction of the social fabric.”**

**Volunteer, Colombia Red Cross**





Photo by: The Tribune – Nitin Mittal, 2018

## India



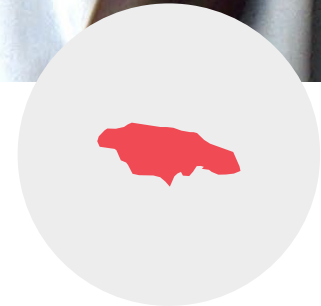
### Snapshot

The Chandigarh Union Territory branch of the Indian Red Cross Society, in association with the Government's District Child Protection Society, manages the mobile Dr B.R. Ambedkar School on Wheels. In its first phase it has catered to several hundred children who are forced into begging, labour and living/working under hazardous conditions on streets in different parts of the city.

The mobile school provides education, health, hygiene, and rehabilitation services, and it also offers free food to children who participate. Children are provided information to access various child protection schemes and programmes such as for adoption, sponsorship, and foster care.

**“ The objective of this school van is to reach out to the children and give them elementary training in basics of education, health and hygiene, cleaning habits and ultimately rehabilitate them into the mainstream education system and reintegrate them with the society.”**

**Staff member, Indian Red Cross Society**



## Jamaica

### Background

The Jamaica Red Cross School of Transformation was established in 1998. It began as a school to support children connected to the streets especially from locations hard hit by community violence. It continues to serve children connected to the streets and also other children who are struggling with the mainstream education system or having challenges accessing education.

The school's aim is to seek ways to provide better life options for children, ages 10-18 years, through improving the social, educational, economical, and other developmental needs of at least one hundred at risk children each year.

The school acts as a bridge to allow children to prepare for and then re-enter or attain a place in the formal school system.

The school currently has two campuses, located in Central Village, St. Catherine and the other being located at Trenton Road, May Pen, Clarendon.

### Action

In order to transition children connected to the streets and other at risk children into traditional schools, the Jamaica Red Cross School of Transformation supports children around:

- Developing literacy (reading and writing from the lowest levels upwards);
- Math;
- music, art, and recreation;
- skills training;

- learning around protection, gender, and inclusion issues; and
- where children display behavioral problems, facilitate access to psychosocial support.
- The experience of the Jamaica Red Cross in the locations where it works has shown that boys are more likely to be out of school and connected to the streets than girls; this is highlighted by the School of Transformation having a majority male population each year.

## Results

Over the years the Jamaica Red Cross has seen many successes through the School of Transformation. These include students:

- accessing education and life skills support they would otherwise not be able access;
- successfully transitioning into traditional schools;
- supported in finding jobs; and
- contributing to positive actions in their communities that has led to the reduction of violence.
- Since its start in 1998, the school has had over 2,200 students.





# Kyrgyzstan

## Background

The Kyrgyzstan Red Crescent's Alignment School in Karakol city aims at social integration and rehabilitation of children connected to the streets in Karakol city.

The school has been operational since 2001. During the years following Kyrgyzstan becoming established as an independent country there were many economic hardships that were leading to a surge in children becoming connected to the streets. In response, the Kyrgyzstan Red Crescent initiated a roundtable with relevant government departments, NGOs, and local donors and agreed to establish the Alignment school.

The Government of Kyrgyzstan provides a psychologist and two social workers while the Kyrgyzstan Red Crescent ensures a facility, school supplies and day-to-day management.

## Action

At any given time, the school has approximately 30 children ages 6-18 years old. In general girls make up 60% of the students and boys 40%.

The Alignment school:

- Is open to children connected to the streets. These are often orphans, children whose parents are in prison, children who have committed small offenses like stealing food, and children from migrant families.
- The Kyrgyzstan Red Crescent delivers education based on the national school curriculum, at least one hot meal a day to all students, and support for students to transfer, once ready, to public schools, night schools, and vocational schools.
- Works to restore family links with parents and relatives.



- Advocate to families to prioritize children's education.
- Assist children to access identification documents since many children in the school are missing those.
- Where living with their own families is not possible, children are supported to find safe accommodation.

## Results

The Kyrgyzstan Red Crescent has addressed a key social problem affecting the city of Karakol. Nearly 300 children have been supported to complete their education and many have been reunited with their families.

Through its outreach to parents, mindsets have shifted so that children are no longer seen as breadwinners but as needing education in order to grow up healthy and to have a promising future.

Many of the children who have been part of the school have gone on to become volunteers at the Kyrgyzstan Red Crescent and through this help others who are in need.

Throughout the program there have been challenges in delivering education to children connected to the streets.

1. In general, parents do not support their children to go to school but rather want them to earn an income as families struggle with economic hardships.
2. Children at the Alignment school often resist staying at their homes because of problems around alcohol and physical and emotional abuse in the family.
3. While the Kyrgyzstan Red Crescent has hosted roundtables with key stakeholders and secured financial commitments, the funds do not always materialize. This makes operationalizing the Alignment school very difficult.
4. Many older students at the Alignment schools, such as those 14 years and older, have missed many years of schooling. As a result they are at the same comprehension level of 7 year-olds. This creates embarrassment for the older students and makes it harder for them to transfer to public or vocational schools.
5. When children are transferred to public schools they can experience stigma because of their circumstances and then return to the Alignment school for help.
6. Many children cannot afford the fee to pay for a passport identification card when they turn 16 years old and are eligible for the passport. The lack of a passport restricts their ability to access some services, find employment, and to live independently.

## Learning

Throughout the implementation of the Alignment school the Kyrgyzstan Red Crescent has tried to learn and adapt its approach to meet the needs of children connected to the streets.

Some key learning includes:

1. It is essential to not only support children but also their families. In particular, the Kyrgyzstan Red Crescent has learned the importance of helping parents find work. This provides greater stability in families and more room for children to attend school rather than be pushed into labour.
2. Kyrgyzstan Red Crescent can have a pivotal role as a convener to bring together key stakeholders. This is how the Alignment school began and continues with support from various government agencies and donors.

A pause of over one year in implementing the Alignment school, due to COVID-19, has led to reports of increased numbers of children connected to the streets in Karakol city.

**“ This school helps children from the streets to integrate into society. There is a decrease in the level of vulnerability to the factor of law, as personal documents are restored to children and they begin to receive all state-guaranteed services (education, health care etc.). School of alignment is a hope for the street kids for a brighter future. Staff member, Kyrgyzstan Red Crescent**



## Malawi

### Background

Like countries around the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in many deaths, illnesses and strains on local social systems including protection services.

The Malawi Red Cross Society has been active in supporting communities to be safe during the COVID-19 pandemic. In its auxiliary role to government public authorities, it has been implementing a number of interventions around health care and social services.

The overall goal of MRCS COVID 19 operation is to contribute towards the national COVID-19 response in prevention, control and responding to the pandemic.

### Action

The Protection and Social support cluster of the Government of Malawi as part of its COVID-19 operation, planned to repatriate children connected to the streets with the aim of reducing the risk of children becoming infected as their risks were amplified by lack of access to adequate preventive measures.

The government reached out to partners for support. The Malawi Red Cross supported the operation with a return home package which included bath and laundry soap, mosquito nets, oral rehydration salts sachets and aqua tabs. The repatriation exercise targeted children who wanted to return to their families and children who deemed it was safe to return.

The operation was implemented in the four cities of the country: Zomba, Blantyre, Lilongwe and Mzuzu.

## Results

The efforts of the Malawi Red Cross and other partners led to 1,005 children connected to the streets being reached. Of these 703 were boys and 302 were girls.

## Learning

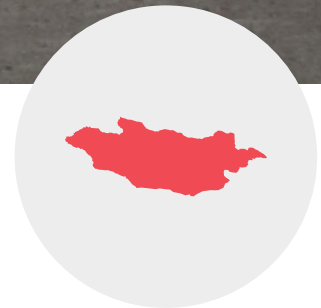
There were a few main lessons learned through this project:

1. A concerted and coordinated effort between local agencies and government can be effective in reaching children connected to the streets in a short time and by leveraging the strengths of each agency.
2. During health crises, it is essential to prioritize the protection of children connected to the streets as their protection needs and risk of infection are high, and they can easily be left out of decision making.

**“ The government appealed to the nation and various stakeholders on the need to repatriate street kids to protect them from COVID 19; The Malawi Red Cross being a humanitarian organization which puts child protection and safeguarding at the centre of its programming and operations, saw the need and responded to government’s appeal by supporting with return home packages.”**

**Staff member, Malawi Red Cross**





# Mongolia

## Snapshot

The Mongolia Red Cross delivers a range of services across the country through Social Care Centres. This is accomplished through partnership with local government and non-governmental agencies.

Among those who access services through the Social Care Centres are children connected to the streets. Children connected to the streets access the centres to spend time in a safe spaces, have snacks/meals, play, get warm in the winter, and engage with other children. Social Care volunteers refer children to the government child protection centre that houses children for one month to assess their needs and find options to connect them with their families.

**“ The homeless children in our district of Bayanzurkh often come from violent or otherwise dysfunctional families and try to avoid them by running away and then they end up back on the street. It is important that the Red Cross is available for the most vulnerable such as children who have no home and live alone on the streets. They have no one else.”**

**Volunteer, Mongolia Red Cross**



# Nigeria

## Background

Cross River State in Nigeria has thousands of children who are connected to the streets. The reason for children being on the streets varies by each child. Yet, some root causes include poverty, unsafe homes, and addictions.

Children connected to the streets in Cross River State are often referred to as “Skolombo,” “tiny witches” or “wizards.” Some of the children are involved in petty crimes, especially against tourists.

The Nigerian Red Cross in Cross River State has been actively working to provide protection and assistance services to children connected to the streets through a project named, «Keep the Kids Off the Streets.»

## Action

The Nigerian Red Cross has set a vision to move over three thousand children by 2023 from the streets of Cross River State, especially from major cities like Calabar, Ikom, Ugep, Ogoja and Obudu.

During the assessment phase the Nigerian Red Cross delivered hygiene kits and hosted events for special days such as Valentine’s Day and Easter.

After the assessment phase, the Nigerian Red Cross created a database of 3,000 children connected to the streets in Cross River State.

For children who wanted to move away from the streets, and were willing, the Nigerian Red Cross began shifting groups of over a hundred children to their premises for 3 month stays. During these three month stays, the Nigerian Red Cross provides multiple services. In particular:

- shelter through dormitories;
- at least two sets of clothing for each child;
- three nutritious meals a day;
- hygiene kits;
- psychosocial support;
- medical check-ups and treatment;
- scholarships for children who want to return to school and where families cannot afford it;
- skill acquisition for those 15 to 18 years old; and
- restoring family links so children can be reunited with their families, where appropriate.

## Results

Since 2017, 1,862 children have been reached by the Nigerian Red Cross. There has been a nearly 50-50 per cent split in girls and boys reached.

A key part of the success of the project has been a partnership with Hope for Street Kids Foundation that has allowed the Nigerian Red Cross to reach children on a consistent basis.

Reaching out to children connected to the streets has led to a number of challenges. These include:

- Some categories of children are hard to access and support, such as children with disabilities, children with addictions, and children with mental health challenges.
- Sexually transmitted diseases are a risk, especially for children who are in sex work, but medical support for them is lacking. This is due in part to little technical expertise and not enough testing kits.
- Newborn babies can be left abandoned at the Red Cross. Steps are then taken to ensure the babies are taken to authorities; the Nigerian Red Cross also manages several orphanages.
- Children connected to the streets have bad reputations in local communities. They are seen as a risk and as petty thieves. These perceptions, and insufficient local support, make providing protection and assistance harder.
- COVID-19 had limited mobility of Nigerian Red Cross volunteers. This has led to less direct interactions with children connected to the streets and made it challenging to follow-up with children who have built relationships with the Red Cross.

## Learning

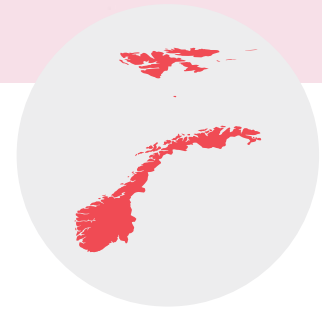
Some of the lessons learned through the delivery of the «Keep the Kids Off the Streets» project include:

1. There are high numbers and needs for children connected to the streets; however, the mistrust in these children translates into few resources and support to deliver protection and assistance services. More needs to be done to build bridges between children connected to the streets and the communities where they live.
2. Deliberate and focused approaches are needed to reach children who are often invisible, such as those with disabilities or addictions, and hard to access due to an assortment of barriers.
3. Children connected to the streets require a menu of services to meet their specific needs based on their age, gender, and disability status.

**“ This whole work is important to us because no child deserves to live in life threatening situations, they may be poor, orphans and homeless yet they deserve to feel safe, loved, valued, their basic needs should be met, a good chance to get education, return to their homes, sustainable livelihood and hope for a sustainable future with all these, crime rate, sexual abuse, early parenthood, drug abuse, poor abortion, rape, STDs, STIs will be reduced.”**

**Staff member, Nigerian Red Cross**





## Norway

### Background

There are children and youth in Norway who lack predictable, adequate, or safe housing. Some might face risks of domestic violence, struggle with substance abuse, have mental health challenges or live in poverty, the background of these young people is, however, not uniform. Many of them live outside the formal system and do not have such daily activities as school or work. This group of young people does to a varying degree spend time on the streets and is in particular apparent in Norway's larger cities. Examples were given of youths who in most extreme cases had to find places to sleep in underground car parks, under benches on the football field, on the night bus or in 24 hrs open gyms.

Through reports from its volunteers who every day interact with local communities, the Norwegian Red Cross became increasingly concerned about these young people. In order to gain a better insight into their problems and draw attention to this in many ways "invisible" problem, the Norwegian Red Cross compiled an advocacy report. The report, "*They Do not Get a Chance: About Young People with Housing Challenges*" was launched in 2020 and focuses on children and youth between the ages of 15 and 23 years.

### Action

For the "*They Do not Get a Chance*" report, 40 interviews were conducted with 79 people in two cities: Trondheim and Oslo. Informants were mainly teachers, employees from the social services, youths who have experiences housing issues, and local stakeholders. Interviews took place one-to-one- or in group-settings.

### Results

The report is used for political advocacy. The Minister of Local Government and Modernisation as well as the Mayor of Oslo took part in the launch of the report and provided comments on issues it brought to light.



The Norwegian Red Cross has met with the Minister of Local Government and Modernisation to discuss follow up of the newly launched National strategy for social housing policies.

The Norwegian Red Cross through its youth programming interact and meet with children struggling with housing.

Accessing young people with housing challenges was difficult because it is not an easy subject to talk about for the youth, and some degree of shame relates to the issue. Often in the youth have dropped out of school or are not in regular jobs. This barrier is further amplified in situations where young people have drug addictions or mental health challenges.

## Learning

Through the *"They Do not Get a Chance"* report, a number of lessons were identified. Some of these include:

1. School is an important arena for capturing young people with housing challenges. The school is, therefore, also a central part of the solution. There is a need for increased competence and more resources in schools to take care of young people with housing challenges. School staff should have access to support systems and knowledge of how the social services is organized at city and municipal level, in order to meet students' housing challenges.
2. Housing challenges affect young people from all socio-economic strata and often have connection with challenging family situations, substance abuse, mental health challenges, or experiences with violence, abuse, or exploitation. In order to prevent housing challenges among young people, it is important to provide holistic support. Social services must reach out as early as possible to families in difficult life situations, with needs-based measures for their various challenges. Young people's housing challenges should not be handled in isolation, but through interdisciplinary cooperation.
3. Many young people with housing challenges are lonely and have limited social and family networks. Voluntary organizations, including the Red Cross, can help complement the public assistance system by offering one-to-one activities and group activities.
4. Youth are in a transition phase between children and adulthood and are in a particularly vulnerable situation as they tend to fall in the gap between support structures from the social services tailor-made for either children or for families. There is a need for closer interdisciplinary co-operation between agencies that help young people in the transition phase between children and adults.
5. Many young people struggling with housing feel excluded from formal and informal social systems and believe that those systems only benefit some people. Trust must be developed so young people experience that there is equality in access to assistance from the social services and from voluntary organizations. The youth must experience that their rights are safeguarded when they are in vulnerable situations.
6. There is a lack of decent housing for young people, especially for young people experiencing substance abuse, but also for youth who are in an acute situation and need a safe place to stay for the night. Options for housing must be flexible enough to meet these realities.
7. In both Oslo and Trondheim, there is a demand for safe low-threshold offers for overnight stays which young people can access without going through the social service system. The voluntary sector, in dialogue with the public sector, must rethink how to contribute to safe low-threshold services for young people with acute housing needs.
8. Concern for young girls exchanging sexual favours for a place to stay the night was raised throughout the data-collection-period. This does not only concern girls, but the concern was raised most often regarding girls. The support system, be it public organisations or voluntary organisations, must be aware of this. There should be more transparency around the topic.



## Senegal

### Snapshot

In Senegal, children connected to the streets are often referred to as “talibé.” This is in reference to children who have been entrusted by their parents to local religious teachers to learn about religious life. However, some of the teachers take advantage of their positions and force children to seek money on the streets.

The children come not only from Senegal, but also from Mali, Guinea and even Niger. Senegal Red Cross staff and volunteers reach out to religious teachers to raise their awareness of the importance of child rights and access to appropriate education. The Senegal Red Cross also offers support to children around Restoring Family Links with their parents.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, recognizing their specific risks and vulnerabilities, the Senegal Red Cross has reached out to children connected to the streets to help provide them access to basic services.



## South Sudan

### Background

South Sudan experienced a civil war in 2013 and 2016 where many families lost loved ones, lost properties, became displaced to neighbouring countries like Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Uganda, Kenya, and Ethiopia. As a result of this conflict, many children have been left to survive on their own on the streets for their daily needs and struggle with mental health and psychosocial challenges and being socially excluded.

The South Sudan Red Cross implemented the Resilient Child To Play (RCTP) project with assistance from the Danish Red Cross. This project supports children ages 3-13 years and their families in the Protection Of Civilians Displacement Camp (POC 3) and five orphanages: Divine Mercy, Juda Home of Orphanage, Street Link, St, Claire, and Living Water Ministry Orphanages Centres.

### Action

The RCTP project has included a number of activities.

- Training South Sudan Red Cross volunteers on working with children.
- Training South Sudan Red Cross volunteers on supporting parents and caregivers. And then reaching out to parents and caregivers.
- Implementing recreational activities like sports, dramas, story telling, and play.
- Supporting child led conferences and a child's parliament.
- Restoring children with their lost ones through Restoring Family Links (RFL).
- Providing mental health and psychosocial support to children.
- Helping children to access local protection and basic services such education and health through referrals.
- Conducting community awareness sessions



The South Sudan Red Cross has provided the following services to orphanages where children connected to the streets often stay the night or benefit from services.

- Construction of toilets and old structures.
- Drilling of boreholes to access water.
- Delivery of mattresses, mosquito nets, blankets, play materials, shoes, books, tents and reading books.

## Results

The South Sudan Red Cross has reached 3,795 children through this program. Of these, 1,958 were boys and 1,837 were girls.

The project has led to improvements in children's sense of hope, reduced the level of interpersonal conflict between children, and parents and caregivers have shared that they have reduced their use of physical punishment of children.

Parents and caregivers have found their own coping mechanisms, and that of children, have improved through the awareness sessions delivered by the South Sudan Red Cross. The sessions have covered topics such as stress management, domestic violence, child marriage and child abuse.

Challenges related to the project have included:

- Limited funds that have resulted in an inability to continue the project and replicate it in other locations of the country.
- The COVID-19 has made reaching children and families more difficult.
- Insecurity due to theft is a threat at the orphanages because they lack fences.

## Learning

A key learning has been that having female volunteers encourages children to share their emotions freely with South Sudan Red Cross volunteers, parents, and caregivers.

The focus on awareness sessions for parents and caregivers was critical. This effort led to reductions in physical discipline against children in POC 3 and in all the five orphanages centres.

***“ South Sudan Red Cross through the RCTP has helped build resilient child who have their hope restored and are better protected. We believe that with our Gender and Diversity holistic approach, we are going to leave NO CHILD BEHIND.”***

**Staff member, South Sudan Red Cross**





## Spain

### Background

The Spanish Red Cross Accompaniment project works with unaccompanied child migrants ages 16-22 years old. The project has been running for 20 years in locations across Spain.

Due to its position connecting Europe and Africa, and between the Americas and Europe, each year thousands of migrant children and youth come to Spain from North Africa and from other parts of the world. In 2020 there were an estimated 9,283 unaccompanied children in the country.

Most unaccompanied children in Spain are supported through local government social services. However, some children fall out of the formal system and can become homeless or at risk of homelessness and require support. Children fall out of the system for a variety of reasons including age assessments that place children as adults, children struggling with formal structures, wanting to move to other locations, and becoming used to life on their own revolving around the streets.

Child migrants who are alone and connected to the streets are at risk of missing out on school, experiencing violence, abuse or exploitation, drug addiction and not being able to access health and other services.

The Spanish Red Cross works with and acts as an auxiliary to local government, partners with International Social Services, and local NGOs.

### Action

The Spanish Red Cross focuses its support to unaccompanied and separated children.

Boys form a majority of the children connected to the streets. However, girls migrants too can be unaccompanied but are often left invisible. Whereas boys are visible on the streets, girls are more at risk of working as domestic servants or being trafficked through underground channels that are harder to detect.

In order to support unaccompanied children, the Spanish Red Cross provides a menu of diverse services. Building close and trusting relationships with each child is a foundation for all of its support. In this way each child has a support pathway specific to their own unique needs. Some of the key services include:

- Advocate for the rights and needs of unaccompanied children with local government;
- Help youth find employment;
- Free time activities that facilitate the connection with their close environment and their sense of belonging to the community
- Support children to complete education through grants, schools supplies, facilitating practicums with local companies so children and youth can build their experience, language classes, and mentoring and coaching to enhance life skills;
- Assist in accessing healthcare services;
- Restore family links and where possible work with families to support children; and
- Stay connected and continue to find ways to support children when they turn 18 years and become adults.

During COVID-19, and especially throughout the related lock-downs, the Spanish Red Cross has provided outreach to child migrants connected to the streets to help them access necessary supports.

## Results

Over the past twenty years, there have been many successes for the project. Among these are:

- Each year 3,000-4,000 unaccompanied children and youth are reached. Around ten percent of these are children connected to the streets;
- Children involved with the project regularly become volunteers of the Spanish Red Cross once they are adults and settled;
- Through advocacy by the Spanish Red Cross, the government is starting a minimum salary recruitment for migrant youth so that they are not exploited with lower wages than others;
- Presently, the Spanish Red Cross is working on a project to follow up with the children and youth it has worked with through the project to understand their current status; and
- Many children relate to volunteers and staff how they see the Spanish Red Cross as part of their family and how much they value the caring support they receive.

The Accompaniment project has encountered many challenges, these include:

- Unaccompanied child migrants connected to the streets are often treated as outside of the formal protection systems; as not being eligible or worthy of the same treatment as other children;
- Child migrants can be determined to be adults by governments thus denying them the support they would be entitled to as children;
- Many children are 16 or 17 years old and so receive formal social support for a very limited time before they become adults and are left on their own; frequently this is not enough time for unaccompanied children to adjust and they are left unprepared and on the streets;
- COVID-19 has worsened the situation for child migrants connected to the streets;
- Unaccompanied children have financial needs such as sending money home to their families; especially when families have saved funds to send them to Europe to find work and help their families back at home;
- Often unaccompanied children lack appropriate legal documents and therefore have to work illegally;
- For the most part, unaccompanied children connected to the streets lack a voice in decisions that affect them; and
- Across Spain the services for children connected to the streets is uneven;
- There is an increase in negative perceptions of unaccompanied children connected to the streets as being dangerous and not worthy of support; this is being intensified by racism.

## Learning

There are many lessons learned each year of the Accompaniment project. Among these are:

1. It is essential to have a child-centred approach where each child's unique needs and capacities is placed at the heart of support;
2. Building a trusting relationship with children is the foundation from which effective support can be delivered;
3. It is essential that children have a voice in all decisions that affect them;
4. A multisector approach between children, professionals and the voluntary sector is required to help provide unaccompanied children with holistic support;
5. When working with unaccompanied children, including those connected to the streets, it is crucial to have unconditional affection. This is shown through deep listening, respecting children's perspectives, understanding their realities, and being reliable in providing support;
6. Not only do service providers need to follow-through on their commitments, but it is also important for children to make their own commitments to highlight what they want, what they will be responsible for, and be clear what actions they will take; and
7. Actions to work with unaccompanied and separated children should apply a gender and intercultural lens so that actions are relevant and recognize different aspects of a child's realities.

**“ I think our work is important because it contributes to generate equal opportunities and promotes a fairer society for all its members. The children we work with are needing positive actions, opportunities, and stability to grow and reach a real emancipated life: access to a living, solid relationships, and a steady job.**

**Staff member, Spanish Red Cross**





## Sri Lanka

### Snapshot

Child Action, an NGO in Sri Lanka, implements a wide range of programming to protect and assist children in vulnerable situations. This includes reaching out to children connected to the streets on ways to stay safe and access help from physical, sexual, and psychological abuse. It uses tools developed by the Red Cross through its “Be Safe” resource kit that has a character puppet, visual cards, interactive activities, and a series of games and songs to emphasize protection messages in a child-friendly way.

Master trainers from Child Action have been trained with support from the Canadian Red Cross and then deliver messages in their local communities seeking out children connected to the streets.





## Syria

### Background

In Aleppo, Syria the Syrian Arab Red Crescent Psychosocial Unit implements a project, “Bokra Ahla.” It helps to protect and assist children connected to the streets regardless of their gender, religion, or social class, and seeks to reach the most underprivileged children.

The project aims to provide a safe place for the children, giving them psychological, educational services and support their family, help them to merge with the society.

### Action

The “Bokra Ahla” project has reached 120 children connected with the streets. The project began as a small pilot and was then expanded once a formal centre was identified in 2016. Through the project the Syrian Arab Red Crescent provides welfare services, Restoring family Links, psychosocial support including play activities, and assistance for education.

Syrian Arab Red Crescent personnel set up activities in local parks where they contact children connected to the streets, organize child friendly activities, and then refer children to the centre for any specific follow-support.

## Results

The project's successes include:

- Restoring Family Links between some children and their families;
- Opening a new drop-in care center with UNICEF;
- Assisting children to access education services; and
- Helping some families access job opportunities.

There have also been challenges and these include:

- Shortage in funding and equipment “educational equipment” and physical assets;
- Some security difficulties with local authorities and some local groups; and
- Difficulty communicating with some families and their rejection of their children completely.

## Learning

The main learning from implementing the project has included:

1. The need to have continuous training especially of new staff and volunteers in order to promote the project and continue conducting sessions with children.
2. Support to children and families can be enhanced through making linkages to cash-based interventions.
3. A level of respect and compassion is needed when working with children and families in such challenging and hard circumstances.
4. Children connected to the streets need safe places to enjoy play, learn skills, and access services.
5. The project has been strengthened through partnerships with the ICRC Restoring Family Links programming and with UNICEF around training for adolescents and youth.



## Turkey

### Background

Child migrants make up a portion of children connected to the streets in Turkey. This is driven by a variety of reasons. For example:

- living in slums as a result of rapid urbanization;
- high unemployment among migrant families;
- economic insufficiency;
- cultural values which promote the working of children on the streets;
- sexual abuse and violence within the family; and
- a lack of educational opportunities.

In 2017 the Turkish Red Crescent initiated a project named, “Peaceful Streets” in Konya, which is Turkey’s largest province in terms of area and the seventh most populous city.

### Action

The “Peaceful Streets” project is a partnership with the Konya Metropolitan Municipality Police Department and the Provincial Directorate of Family and Social Services under the coordination of Konya Provincial Police Department Juvenile Branch Office.

The Turkish Red Crescent has focused its support to children who are forced to work on the streets. According to the data from 2017 by the Provincial Directorate of Family and Social Services the number of children working on the streets was 140 children of which 105 were originally from Syria.

To help protect and assist these children, the Turkish Red Crescent provides multiple services, including:

- detection of children working on the street with a team of six people, two personnel from the Turkish Red Crescent, and two each from the Ministry of Family and Social Services and the local police department
- connecting children to local agencies and resources to access essential basic services such as healthcare, education, clothing, and food banks, and toiletries;
- referring children to specialist services such as for mental health and psychosocial support;
- supporting children to restore family links with their families where appropriate and safe, where children support it, and after interviews with families to ensure safety; and
- applying for financial grants to support children.

## Results

As a result of this project there have been several achievements:

- while the number of children working on the streets were 105 in 2017, there have been 80 children were detected in 2019 and in a later follow-up 28;
- educational measures were applied to 49 children, and health measures were applied to 12 children.
- In Konya, there has been effective coordination between relevant public institutions and non-governmental organizations. This is not the case in all parts of the country, but in Konya it has allowed joint efforts to protect children working on the streets.
- This project has led to schools piloting the use of “school social workers” who interact directly with school administrations as well as students and families, providing leadership in forming school discipline policies, mental health intervention, crisis management, and support services. The Turkish Red Crescent carries out some interventions for children who are identified as needing support a result of the pilot.

## Learning

Through this project the main learning for the Turkish Red Crescent has been:

1. It is essential to form a confidential database, including detailed information about those children working on the streets, in order to monitor support to children.
2. It is important to work with the families of children working on the streets in order to help provide them appropriate support based on their particular needs.
3. It is helpful to work with families using a multi-discipline approach. For example, by including a translator, social worker, and a law enforcement officer when reaching out. In this way, the central aim is to understand why children are pushed to the streets to work.
4. Socio-economic support can be a key solution to help families protect children from working on the streets.
5. It is important for people in the community to be aware of the fact that children working on the streets are exploited. Public awareness can be achieved through public service advertisements, including slogans like “Do not encourage but help” in order to explain that buying things from children working on the streets does not support them financially but instead leads them to stay on the streets.

**“ This project is a great example showing that the future of children on the streets will be brightened when all stakeholders take responsibility. Therefore, the project is vital to protect the most vulnerable children while enhancing the capacity of stakeholders for future interventions in regard to the children on the street.”**

**Staff member, Turkish Red Crescent**



# **THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT**

## **Humanity**

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

## **Impartiality**

It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

## **Neutrality**

In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

## **Independence**

The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

## **Voluntary service**

It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

## **Unity**

There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

## **Universality**

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.



The vision of the IFRC is to inspire, encourage, facilitate and promote at all times all forms of humanitarian activities by National Societies, with a view to preventing and alleviating human suffering, and thereby contributing to the maintenance and promotion of human dignity and peace in the world.