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LEARNING BRIEF

THE ROLE OF FAITH IN STRENGTHENING THE CONTINUUM OF PROTECTION FOR CHILDREN ON THE MOVE

This is one brief in a series of three¹ concerning faith-based action for children on the move.² The purpose is to help faith actors,³ development practitioners, policymakers, and donors learn about faith communities' global contribution to prevent and respond to violence against children on the move. The learnings in these briefs come from a systematic review of academic and grey literature⁴ and a call for case-study submissions. Two hundred and twenty-two documents and 33 case studies were reviewed.⁵ The findings from this review can be used to shape policy and practice regarding faith communities' support to children on the move. The learning briefs will also support the evidence base for the Faith Action for Children on the Move Forum,⁶ held in Rome, 16–19 October 2018. It is acknowledged that there are many further examples than those included in this literature review; the hope is that more practice examples will emerge during the forum.

Defining the concepts

Child protection includes efforts to end abuse, exploitation, neglect and violence against children. Though there is not a standard industry definition, the range of services needed to ensure a continuum of child protection includes prevention, response, reintegration

and restoration. Refugee and migrant children are particularly vulnerable to violence.

As children move, there needs to be a continuum of protection to ensure they remain safe throughout their journeys. It was estimated in 2016 that three quarters of children aged 14–17 years arriving in Italy

through the Mediterranean route had been subject to exploitative practices such as being held or forced to work against their will.⁷ Data from 2014 showed that in Central America and the Caribbean, as well as in Sub-Saharan Africa, children represented over 60 per cent of trafficking victims, the highest figures in the world.⁸

Faith influence on strengthening the continuum of protection for children on the move

Faith actors are at the front lines of providing protection and can offer added value in terms of local and sustained child protection. They can also be involved in practices that negatively impact the protection of children on the move, such as supporting child marriage or not utilising reporting and referral mechanisms. Strengthening the presence and capacity of faith actors and associated networks around the world will allow for an enhanced continuum of protection for children on the move.

Prevention

Faith actors can influence sociocultural beliefs and practices to prevent violence against children on the move. Interfaith initiatives in this vein are emerging as particularly impactful.

Faith actors influence sociocultural beliefs and practices

A study examining awareness-raising of HIV and AIDS among young people and children in a Dar el Salaam refugee camp demonstrated that the most influential educational channel for spreading knowledge about HIV and AIDS in the camp was through sociocultural beliefs and practices, including through tribal chiefs, religious leaders and songs (as this communication happened in the refugees' first language).⁹ In this case the intervening NGOs worked with the leaders as a channel through which knowledge could be shared. For instance, Muslim leaders spoke during the Friday prayer sermon about HIV and AIDS and how people can protect themselves, using the Qur'an to reinforce their message.¹⁰

In another example, an area advisory council was developed in Kilifi, Kenya, which brought together government officers and other actors such as religious leaders to sensitise the community on child rights, promote education and support children whose rights were violated or limited, such as child labourers. In this context religious leaders played an important role in connecting different stakeholders, which they could facilitate due to their experience working in child protection issues and the fact that other stakeholders respected them.¹¹

Other social norms affecting children on the move lead to increased rates of early and child marriage for girls¹² and gender-based violence.¹³ Religious leaders can influence attitudes about violence perpetrated on children on the move. In Lebanon, ABAAD has worked with religious leaders on gender-based violence, but there is recognition that the refugee crisis slowed much of this work, and the dynamics of displacement mean that religious leaders may be less influential than previously due to fewer connections, economic factors, and so on.¹⁴

Interfaith initiatives for cooperation and collaboration can positively change attitudes and behaviours toward children on the move

By working within faiths, across faiths and with those of no faith, increased cooperation can help change attitudes and behaviours to positively impact children on the move. In the Kilifi Catholic Church, Kenya, the Bamba Pastor Fellowship and Muslim leaders were identified as having a particularly important role in child protection projects, supporting orphans with fees, building houses and sensitising parents on child rights.¹⁵ Similarly, in Mombasa slums, Muslim and Christian leaders developed awareness programmes and taught children about child protection issues. They were also instrumental in education provision, for example, raising money and finding sponsors for children's school fees¹⁶ – with school seen as a preventative protection measure in many studies.¹⁷ Churches have an important role in providing support with financial aid, particularly to those without refugee registration.¹⁸

Response

Community-based child protection mechanisms

Community-based child protection mechanisms¹⁹ receive crucial resources from religious groups and legitimisation from religious leaders²⁰ that help them become trustworthy and sustainable.

Faith actors' long-term presence and access in communities allow for continued protection as children are displaced²¹

Local faith actors provide a continuum of protection to prevent and respond to violence against children. Faith actors are highly involved in these mechanisms.²² They often have strong links with marginalised refugee and migrant groups who otherwise find it difficult to connect with the host community and services.²³ They can be the fastest to respond in an emergency situation²⁴ and have access in fragile contexts that are inaccessible to external actors.²⁵

Practice example: Connecting accompaniment, awareness-building and advocacy to provide a continuum of safe spaces for children on the move in the Northern Triangle, Mexico and the United States²⁶

The Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities (AMMPARO) project, from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), was envisioned after witnessing the plight of children who are forced to flee their communities because of complex and interrelated reasons, including chronic violence, poverty, environmental displacement and lack of opportunities in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala. Due to their connection to companion churches in the region, including companion synod relationships, and existing ministries in the United States, the ELCA is well-positioned to help ensure that these vulnerable children are protected through addressing root causes in origin countries and connecting to services and advocacy efforts in networked churches in transit and destination countries.

Activities

The ELCA has been working with partners, including the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, through strategies for ministry with those in the origin, transit and destination countries (United States), focusing on three guiding principles.

1. *Accompaniment*, including

- mobilising and enhancing the participation and alliance-building capacity of churches in the Northern Triangle of Central America
- helping to ensure that children and families in the United States will have appropriate legal representation and assisting children who do not have sponsors
- urging congregations to become ‘safe places’/‘gathering places’ for migrants and volunteers and encouraging congregations to develop service centres that focus on needed social services, including ‘wrap-around services’ such as education, life skills, legal assistance, and so forth).

2. *Awareness-building*, including

- working with all ministries in the church to raise awareness for implementation of protocols and conducting immersion programmes and tours for ELCA members.

3. *Other advocacy measures*, including

- bringing together ELCA synods, ethnic-specific ministries, partners, the Immigration Ready Bench, synods on the Mexico border and other communities serving migrants to advocate for fair and compassionate migration policies
- Encouraging local advocacy by companions as well as solidarity advocacy by international companions in a coordinated and collaborative way.

Lessons

- Transnational religious networks are among the few institutional relationships that can work across countries while still reaching grassroots initiatives in each country. Thus, holistic strategies that address root causes of migration through to advocacy for immigrants can be combined in origin, transit and destination countries.

Faith leaders have a role in reporting and referral mechanisms

Issues around the role of faith actors in child protection reflect the social norms of certain communities.²⁷ Obstacles to child protection can include the use of non-formal actors such as religious leaders as the only point of call when child protection issue arises, rather than including referral mechanisms to other actors (such as NGOs, police and government agencies, as appropriate for the case)²⁸ so that cases are properly reported.

Faith actors are key local stakeholders in refugee camps, filling gaps in response mechanisms and services for children on the move

In Rwandan refugee camps, the benefits of community support and guidance were significant in cases where a child faced protection threats, such as prostitution, delinquency, lack of access to and continuation of education, and early pregnancy. Churches are key actors for child protection in the camps. Churches helped by 'providing classroom space, space in both camps for ECD (early childhood development) centres and regularly disseminating child protection messages through their church networks. Churches also reportedly provided some financial support to families in need, such as those without refugee registration.'²⁹ In Gihembe Camp they created a child protection forum with representatives from NGOs, UNHCR, churches, government representatives and other camp committees.³⁰ This collaboration is important as other examples have shown that community-based child protection measures can be disconnected from formal child protection measures and the child protection work of other actors.³¹

Faith actors support caregivers

To best respond to children's needs, their families may also need support. Faith actors have developed ways to support the whole family. For example, in Florida, the Redlands Christian Migrant Association has been running 70 centres providing early education to children of farmworkers and low-income families while integrating voluntary childcare for parents. The programmes are adaptable to the schedules of seasonal farmworkers and to their needs. Many former migrant workers are employed as staff and teachers. A community learning centre supports the learning needs of parents.³²

Faith actors support community-based child protection and provide non-formal educational environments

Faith actors are involved in local, non-formal education delivery to provide safe learning spaces for children who would otherwise be out of school. For example, in Lebanon faith actors have been operating unofficial schools and non-formal educational programmes for Syrian refugees.³³ It is estimated³⁴ that up to 100,000 Syrian refugees are enrolled in these unofficial schools, with an unknown number in non-formal education projects provided by faith actors.

In limited instances, unofficial and non-formal programmes have meant less stringent regulations, with, for example, unlicensed and unvetted teachers,³⁵ lessons outside national curricula,³⁶ poor funding or influence from donors on educational content when there is funding,³⁷ with varying levels of evangelism-based religious education³⁸ and divergent Western and local ideologies.³⁹ Some faith-based education projects represent the only education available to children, and non-formal education projects are important to help children transition to formal education. There remain many opportunities to support such programmes with teacher training and other capacity-building measures.

Reintegrating children on the move

Faith actors are uniquely placed to help integrate child refugees into host communities.

Faith actors can help integrate (or reintegrate) children who have been moving into host communities

In Senegal the Marists of the Sector of Senegal have been running the Nazareth Centre in Dakar, which supports children living or working on the street. They have a range of services including showers, meals, laundry services, family reunification, awareness-raising, medical treatment and an outreach programme.⁴⁰

Another Catholic-run organisation, Associação Promocional Oracão e Trabalho (APOT), in Campinas, Brazil, has been running a similar outreach programme for children living or working on the streets. It aims to promote successful reinsertion of the children into the community through training and educational programmes and to facilitate substance-abuse recovery.⁴¹ The organisation has a halfway house for adolescents and another six-month rehabilitation centre. Results indicate that the APOT programme has been successful, with 56 per cent of all residents at

Practice example: Local faith communities in Lille, France, help convene a grassroots collective to protect unaccompanied minors⁴²

The Lille Collective for Unaccompanied Minors developed from various organisations coming together to assist unaccompanied minors and youth. Organisations involved include Le Centre de la Reconciliation (Baptist Church Centre), various Catholic and evangelical parishes, host families, local government representatives, local organisations (Vincent de Paul, l'Abej, Association Mitrajectoires) and international organisations, including Amnesty International, the International Association for Refugees (IAFR) and Médecins Sans Frontières

Activities

- This grassroots effort attempts to address the needs of the children and young people who are among the 200 to 300 refugees and asylum seekers who are regularly living on the streets of Lille. The majority of these young people are from Muslim backgrounds.
- The work began in 2014 when local officials asked the Reconciliation Church (Baptist Church) if it would allow the youth who were sleeping nearby in a park to stay at night in the church. The church opened its doors for over a year, after which it appealed to the local community for more support. Over 80 local community members attended the first meeting and, for some, it was their first time in the church.
- A local collective was formed to find a long-term housing solution. Since then other parishes, NGOs and individuals have begun to address various needs – working alone or together with others. The efforts include housing assistance, legal and administrative accompaniment and education.

Lessons

- Local faith communities can be the conveners of local community response beyond the membership of the faith community itself.
- The lack of centralisation and lack of a single organising group can make it easy for others to get involved. This creates a grassroots effort that can result in less institutional support from the government, as there is a perception that the grassroots effort has solved the issue.

Practice example: Religious communities supporting children on the move to transition to formal education

The Marist International Solidarity Foundation (FMSI), a faith-based organisation, has been working globally to support children on the move in countries including South Africa, Spain, Thailand, Rwanda, Australia, Lebanon and Uruguay.⁴³ The Three2Six programme⁴⁴ in Johannesburg, South Africa, is described in this example. There are 300 child beneficiaries and a long waiting list.

Activities

- The English-language programme targets primary-school-aged migrant children, aiming to prepare them for entry into high school or other public schools in the neighbourhood. The programme, running from first to sixth grade, does not intend for children to attend all grades in the programme but to move on to mainstream schooling once they are ready.
- Those with particular difficulties are assigned to a special class to improve their level until they attain the skills of their age group.
- The students are then supported in the mainstream school and provided uniforms and school supplies.
- A local rabbi supports the programme, attends special events and hosts class visits at the synagogue. A member of the local mosque also hosts class visits.

Lessons

Efforts are now under way to understand how to better measure the children's resilience and understand their resilience when measured against national and regional levels.

APOT reinserted into the community upon leaving the programme, with the majority of these children returning home to their families.⁴⁵ It was noted that although reintegration into families is seen as a successful indicator, it is important that they return to safe homes where their needs can be met, otherwise the child may return to the street.

Faith actors supporting multi-sectoral child protection programmes

Recognising that holistic approaches are needed to address child protection needs, faith actors work holistically across many programmatic sectors, such as health, education and nutrition, for children on the move. This multi-sectoral approach means that faith actors think and work across programme areas to respond adaptively to the varying needs of children on the move.

Child friendly spaces for children on the move in emergencies

Child friendly spaces (CFSs) are an example of a multi-sectoral support service for children on the move. Faith actors, including World Vision, have developed many CFSs across the world, in countries such as Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. Many of these CFSs are set up independently of faith groups, however. In a CFS in Lebanon, 57 per cent of children reported feeling better after psychosocial support activities run in the centre.⁴⁶ The limited literature on the involvement of faith in CFSs, however, highlights the need to focus on monitoring and evaluating the projects in place, not only continuously to improve on current practices⁴⁷ but also to gain a better understanding of the potential role of faith actors in CFS provision.

Practice example: Creating a communal space for refugee and host community interactions in Serbia⁴⁸

The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), the development arm of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, runs a community centre targeting children on the move with their families (principally mothers and girls) who are currently living in Serbia and also unaccompanied minors (mainly males). These children are mainly from Syria or Afghanistan. The centre is a communal asset frequented by the host community, with some people also volunteering from local Adventist churches. The motto of the centre is 'For the Common Good'. It resembles a small village where one can spend time and participate in different activities every working day. The service has been used by 998 children.

Activities

- Informal and formal education for children (with families and unaccompanied minors) in Belgrade schools includes interpretative support for children, classes during summer and winter break to prepare children for the new school year; an official satellite class held in classrooms in the centre, life skills, language classes, legal information, career counselling and certified vocational training for unaccompanied minors. A number of the young people have been offered jobs following this training. However, this has been dependent on their migration status and right to work.
- There is a prayer space set aside and equipped for the Muslim women and children who attend the centre and a space set aside for childcare while parents take part in classes.
- A buddy programme with out-of-class activities serves refugee and migrant children and children from the local community. This programme aims to build intercultural bridges and foster integration.

Lessons

- The comprehensiveness of the approach used in the centre reflects the holistic nature of the mission. According to ADRA and the Seventh-day Adventist Church, everything in human life should be empowered and restored to the original, divine image, which means the flourishing of each human individual and of the human community.
- There needs to be further effort to animate local church leaders and members to get more involved in such programmes. This is important to increase regular interaction of faith community members and beneficiaries to improve local integration.

Practice example: Establishing inter- and intra-faith CFS for internally displaced children in the Central African Republic (CAR)⁴⁹

The CAR Communication with Communities (CwC) project by World Vision International aims to support internally displaced persons (IDPs) in a camp in Yaloke, CAR. Faith leaders worked together to implement this project, facilitating a conversation to reduce hostility between the predominantly Christian host community and Muslim IDPs. Within a month this collaboration resulted in IDPs (who were previously confined to the camp) being granted access to local markets and public service centres.

Activities

- Local faith community leaders, namely local imams, pastors and priests, worked closely with World Vision in developing its Communication with Communities approaches, such as designing appropriate communication methods, finding locations, supporting the programme startup and developing consultation groups.
- These leaders contributed to setting up an interfaith CFS and designing changes for two of World Vision's CFS (one for the Muslim IDP population and the second for the Christian IDP population).⁵⁰

Lessons

- The goodwill fostered through this inclusive, interfaith dialogue has carried over in all World Vision projects and all its project locations in the country.

Key learnings

1. Faith actors' grounding in local communities allows them to build the community's trust in and ownership of child protection mechanisms. Faith actors help to build bridges – among faiths, among government actors and other organisations, and with the host community – that are crucial for the success of child protections programmes for children on the move.
2. Faith actors operate in ways that are automatically holistic and multi-sectoral. They respond to the varying needs of children on the move, including healthcare, education, psychosocial and spiritual support and needs of their parents and caregivers.
3. More evidence is needed around the effectiveness of CFS to continuously improve on current practices and gain a better understanding of the potential role of faith actors in CFS provision.
4. Difficulties arise when community and grassroots initiatives are not supported by broader networks with capacity training, resources and authority. Capacity strengthening is beneficial to local faith actors so that they can protect children on the move. Links with religious networks across countries and regions help support faith actors to provide for children on the move and advocate for continued protection.

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The studies and reports mentioned in this learning brief can be found at childrenonthemove.jliflc.com.

ENDNOTES

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- 2 The term *child on the move* includes all children who have migrated across borders or been forcibly displaced across borders.
- 3 The term *faith actor* is used in this brief to encompass a wide range of actors affiliated with religious belief and practices, including, but not limited to, local faith communities, religious leaders, local and national faith-based organisations, and international faith-based organisations.
- 4 Grey literature includes policy statements and issue papers; conference proceedings; pre-prints and post-prints of articles; theses and dissertations; research reports; newsletters, bulletins and fact sheets.
- 5 The resources and documents related to the case study submissions can be found at <https://jliflc.com/conferences/children-on-the-move-global-church-partners-forum/>.
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