



Pulling Back the Curtain

What Do Non-Funders
Think Are the Key
Challenges, Needs, Gaps
and Opportunities in
Supporting Children
and Young
People Facing
Adversity?

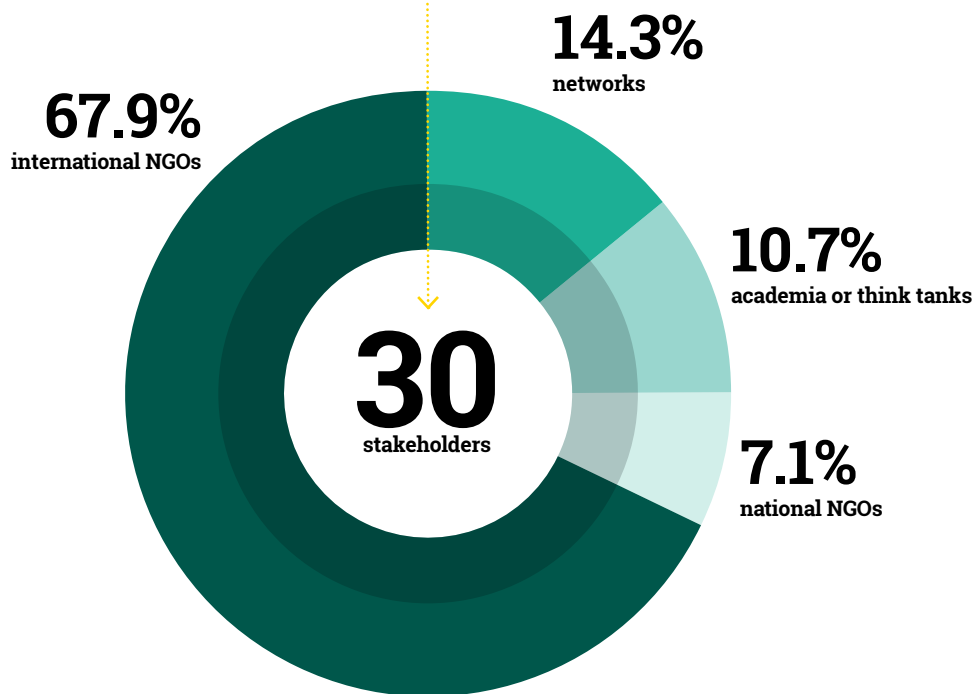
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Introduction

One of Elevate Children Funders Group's (ECFG) overarching goals is to map emerging trends, gaps and opportunities across the children and youth in adversity field. To this end, the ECFG Secretariat recently undertook an exercise and asked non-funders for their input. It is a rare opportunity for non-funders to honestly and anonymously share with funders their candid feedback of what is working and not working. By sharing and learning together, we can both deepen our knowledge and ensure better outcomes for children and young people the world over.

In July-August 2019, the ECFG Secretariat shared a six-question survey with over 70 non-funder stakeholders representing academia, think tanks, networks, UN agencies, international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations, human rights organizations and youth-led organizations around the world. These stakeholders work in the field of violence prevention, child protection, children's care, early childhood development, mental health, youth empowerment, child and youth rights, and education. ECFG received responses from **30 stakeholders**, representing: international NGOs (67.9%); networks (14.3%); academia or think tanks (10.7%); and national NGOs (7.1%). Forty-two percent are based in North America, thirty-six percent in Europe and the United Kingdom, one representative in Latin America; and three representatives in South and Southeast Asia. All responses were in English, except for one (Spanish).



This report is an analysis of the feedback that we received to the following six questions:

I

What do you expect to be the most pressing challenge that you and your partners will face in the coming years?

II

What have been the major successes the last few years in supporting and protecting children and youth facing adversity globally?

III

What are the major challenges and needs for children and youth facing adversity globally?

IV

What issue (specific to children and youth facing adversity) do you think will become more important in the coming years?

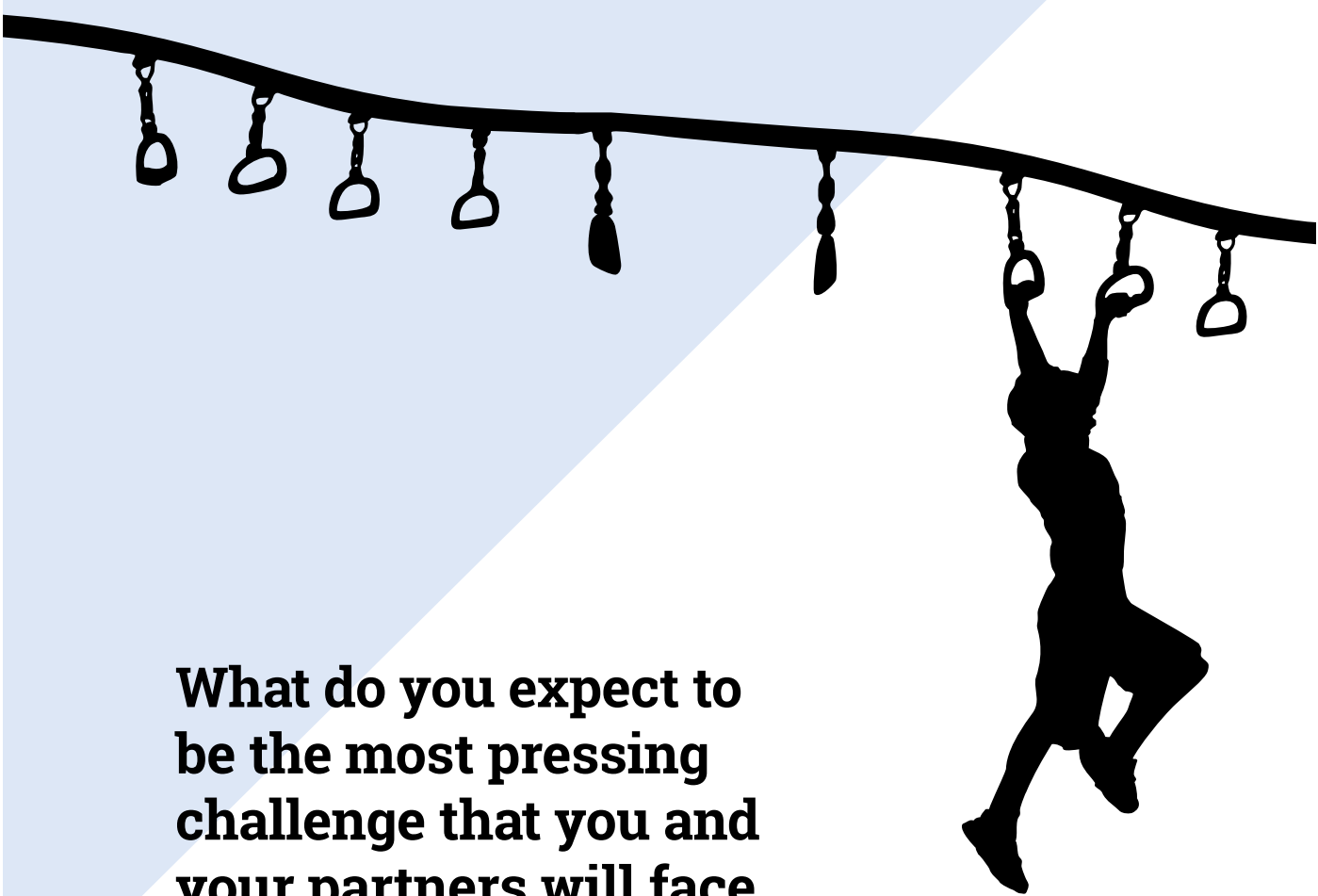
V

What have been the major gaps in funding for children and youth facing adversity?

VI

What can foundations do more effectively in supporting you and your partners to carry out your work?

We recognize that this was a simplistic exercise and not a deep analysis. In the future, it is recommended that ECFG expand this analysis over a six-month period by conducting in-depth interviews, virtual and in-person focus group discussions and meet with organizations and youth/child activists working at country and community levels. As an attempt to pull back the curtain and break down barriers between funders and the non-funder community, we nonetheless hope that this report provides ECFG members and partners with a better understanding of the challenges and needs of implementing organizations and most importantly, of children and young people.



What do you expect to be the most pressing challenge that you and your partners will face in the coming years?

Survey responses ranged from geopolitical challenges to more specific sector-related and organizational issues.

Evolving geopolitical context

- Global migration due to violence, conflict, climate change and shifting economic opportunities is increasingly affecting children's protection and well-being. Over 50 million children are on the move. Growing research shows that migration has negative impacts on children's development across psychosocial, physical, and cognitive outcomes which, if not mitigated, will affect their health and well-being as adults, as well as their future children.
- Growing xenophobia and repressive migration management regimes and policies are forcing people – including parents and children – to take greater risks to ensure the safety of their family, making them more vulnerable to violence, exploitation, detention, trafficking, and bodily harm.
- Climate change, humanitarian emergencies, economic shocks and rising inequality.
- The global rise of populism, nationalism, anti-gender ideologies, autocratic regimes, and a retreat from internationalism are facilitating the erosion of commitment to human rights (including children's rights) while narrowing the scope of civil society and fostering both political and economic instability. Brexit, elections across Europe, the current U.S. administration and President Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines were all mentioned as markers of a growing nativism.

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The rise of anti-human rights movements poses a significant challenge to human rights in general and children's rights specifically. These groups adopt the language (and techniques) of human rights to promote racist, misogynistic, homophobic and nationalist views, particularly in relation to gender and restrictive definitions of the family. This is a phenomenon that affects not only children's rights, but also women's rights and LGBTI right groups. All of this requires a more unified and collaborative approach to human rights campaigning among the groups that share the same challenges.

—Survey respondent

What do you expect to be the most pressing challenge that you and your partners will face in the coming years?

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Broader humanitarian and development systems challenges

- Increasing fragmentation of global level initiatives, which creates competition for funding and technical resources. Donors can play a significant role in streamlining.
- Reduced public funding and declining public support for the charity sector, international development and humanitarian response. As humanitarian crises become more protracted and long-term, fatigue among partners and donors is growing.
- Increasingly narrow remits around funding and grants (including lack of core funding) is resulting in fewer opportunities overall and limiting the scope for creativity and innovation.
- There is a contradiction between the growing localization agenda and increasingly tight compliance/due diligence donor requirements. As power is increasingly shifted toward Southern partners, many of them face practical constraints in meeting donors' due diligence demands and find it difficult to "buy-in" the support of agencies outside their country.
- Short-term political advantages drive the selection of development priorities. Often focused on single issues and vertical programming, development priorities are rarely holistic in nature and do not target long-term empowerment.
- Capacity in the sector is limited, especially for the highly technical areas of child protection and the pool of skilled workers is not keeping pace with growing needs and demands.

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Fragmented, ad hoc, and un-strategic funding that promotes competition between actors in this sector rewards 'flash in the pan' solutions that are high profile but short on evidence, does not promote collaboration in developing evidence-based solutions, and advocacy across organizations and sectors is part of the problem.

—Survey respondent

Marginalization and rising distrust of children and young people in the international system

- There is a rising distrust of young people among institutions, including international NGOs, foundations and multilateral agencies. "The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security"¹ describes how this mistrust is mutual – with many of these institutions perpetuating negative stereotypes and narratives regarding young people as primarily troublemakers or framing them as passive victims and "beneficiaries." We need to find a new way to engage young people as partners and rebuild the trust between institutions and young people.
- A key challenge we will have to continue to address is the overlap between childhood (as a legal term) and youthhood (as a social category), which currently exist as silos.

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Young people around the world describe a 'violence of exclusion' that manifests across politics, economic inclusion, education, human rights, gender, disengagement and reintegration efforts.

—Survey respondent

What do you expect to be the most pressing challenge that you and your partners will face in the coming years?

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¹ Available here: <https://www.youth4peace.info/system/files/2018-10/youth-web-english.pdf>

- Those who are working to support children and families are still working in thematic silos, be it around forms of adversity or groups of affected children. We are not thinking about children and their needs in a holistic manner. Developmental and relational issues, as well as children's rights issues, are not adequately embedded into program design and implementation. Increasingly, we see individualized programs or pilot projects emerging that are designed to meet the (narrow) needs of very

specific groups of children and which may not be sustainable or scalable. Mainstreaming services and strengthening child-protection systems to be more sustainable and inclusive needs greater attention.

- We need to be able to demonstrate the "how" of change and provide evidence of the longer-term impact for children and their families, but also for societies. This includes demonstrating the costs of inaction as well as the benefits of action in human, social, and financial terms.

Thematic silos of the sector and lack of systems strengthening

“ *The growing trend to divide core child rights and child protection work into trending thematic areas and to funding only in these thematic areas versus funding core child protection activities and sustainable systems strengthening. It becomes difficult to encourage the donor community to invest in core systems strengthening and training of existing workers to address unique needs of all groups of children.*

—Survey respondent

Coordination and collaboration

- The lack of strategic coordination and collaboration among non-governmental actors, between non-governmental actors and government, between donors, and between donors and implementing organizations must be effectively addressed in order to make bigger collective impact.

Measurement and evaluation

- Data collection, verification and measurement – “we do not know how many children and families there are that are in need of our help...”
- There is a lack of across-the-board outcome evaluation of work addressing children and families.

Specific issue areas

- Children with disabilities.
- Quality education.
- Alternative care and institutional care.

What do you expect to be the most pressing challenge that you and your partners will face in the coming years?

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We obsess over outputs and number of children or families reached, but we know precious little about how children do in a year or five years after we intervene in their lives.

—Survey respondent

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II

What have been the major successes the last few years in supporting and protecting children and youth facing adversity globally?



While most of the respondents noted successes, two of the survey respondents were less hopeful:

"A majority of the successes connect to health, which is a problem since child well-being goes beyond health." – Survey respondent

"I do not see any circumstances of global improvements for children." – Survey respondent

The more optimistic outlook among other respondents identified successes that include a growing community of actors responding to the needs of children and families in need: "There does seem to be a small, committed group of actors who genuinely remain committed to children's rights, or rather, committed to genuine children's rights in a robust and radical way."

Coordination and collaboration

- There is greater awareness of the need for health and social services to be coordinated and collaborative as the issues they involve are co-related. There is also greater awareness of the negative impacts on health that derive from a lack of access to basic needs met through social services.
- Sectoral silos are increasingly being bridged or dissolved as integrated programming, which involves taking a more holistic approach to children's needs, is growing.
- For some, collaboration between education and child-protection sectors is growing.
- Global interagency initiatives, where agencies joined hands to work together in unity. This is illustrated by, for example, the presence of inter-agency massive open online courses (MOOCs) on topics related to children in adversity.
- Government-coordinated efforts in Cambodia have increased. Efforts include mandated targets, changes in policy and improved NGO coordination, all of which have yielded gains for the social work and child-protection sectors in Cambodia.

Global advocacy and awareness raising

- The increased involvement of children in human rights advocacy, particularly in the climate crisis, marks a strong and positive step forward in addressing the issues affecting children today. Mobilizing children in youth-led protests and campaigning groups could create the basis for broader societal change while ensuring that attempts to protect children and young people's rights involve and are led by children and young people.
- We see increased awareness among the donor community of the need to support children and youth in humanitarian contexts, as illustrated by the newly formed Education Cannot Wait Fund.
- Awareness of the importance of safeguarding and protecting children and young people – as a collective responsibility – is growing. This is manifest in rising international awareness of trafficking, slavery and extreme forms of child labor.
- We see greater public awareness of the importance of investing in children's early years and in family-based care, as well as the role of a competent and resourced social-service workforce and that of families and parenting in children's well-being (not to mention the negative impact that poor care can have on children). In addition, the growing body of evidence in neuroscience is far more effectively and strategically leveraged to influence policy, interventions and funding.
- Vulnerable children, youth and families as an issue has been placed on the global agenda, as is illustrated by UN frameworks and recommendations.²

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The growing role of child agency (beyond participation), including advocating for change at global policy level on issues that go beyond individual experiences.

—Survey respondent

What have been the major successes the last few years in supporting and protecting children and youth facing adversity globally?

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2 (1) Growing global commitment to ending violence against children: adoption of the SDGs, the creation of INSPIRE and the Global Partnership to End VAC; (2) UN Resolution on Children without Parental Care, an agreement by over 145 organizations on 64 key related asks; (3) launch of the Nurturing Care Framework for children, 0-3; (4) UNCRPD recognizes in law new lessons learned about the realities of discrimination and the opportunities for inclusion for children with disabilities; (5) Passage of the UN Security Council Resolution 2250 and 2419, recognizing the positive role that young people play in preventing and responding to violence and sustaining peace.

Coordination and collaboration

- Reduction of child poverty and child mortality.
- Reduction of early marriage, FGM/C and child labor, heightened mobilization on climate change, and growth in the number of states that are reducing child detention rates and prohibiting corporal punishment.
- Increasing commitment to ending violence against children.
- Continued progress on education, which includes a focus on violence within education. Globally, net enrollment rates for primary education and literacy rates among girls have risen.
- Alternative care and children's care. Understanding of the harm done to children by separating families is growing, as is awareness of the harm done by institutional care. In addition, support is building for family and community-based alternative care and care leavers, as is support for parents with child welfare experiences exercising their influence in decision-making. Finally, on-the-ground capacity-building on related issues is growing.
- Early childhood development. More attention is being paid to children's early years as a critical stage of development, and the need for and implementation of integrated services is increasingly recognized.
- There is a growing emphasis on social and emotional development and its relationship to other domains of development.
- Extending the definition of child vulnerability to include youth over the age of 18. The category "children and youth" was almost nonexistent before 2017.
- Structured monitoring, evaluation and data collection. We see a growing a focus on evidence-based interventions and testing strategies that allow interventions to scale.

What have been the major successes the last few years in supporting and protecting children and youth facing adversity globally?

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What are the major challenges and needs for children and youth facing adversity globally?

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Policymakers continue to fail prioritizing that long-term investments in children will yield better outcomes.

—Survey respondent

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There are wide gaps between our aspiration and the reality on the ground. Protection is still not a priority for most countries around the world.

—Survey respondent

The survey respondents identified several critical challenges that are making it difficult to meet the vast needs of children and youth facing adversity worldwide.

One of the overarching challenges identified by several survey respondents was the lack of agency experienced by children and young people in identifying their needs, and in finding solutions to address these needs. Overall, there is still insufficient respect for children's voices, and the degree of genuine commitment to children's right to participate is weak. Several respondents observed that stakeholders are refusing to listen to children and young people themselves and are not taking these youths' contribution to change seriously. This has resulted in unsuccessful initiatives (policies and programming are more effective when children and young people are involved).

This challenge is exemplified by the limited availability of direct funding for youth-led work, a circumstance that has hindered youth-led interventions from reaching wider audiences or having greater impact. Youth-led groups also face challenges with regard to monitoring and assessing the impact of their initiatives due to a lack of time, capacity, and human resources. The terminologies used add additional challenges for children and young people. One respondent eloquently captured the challenges and grievances of young people:

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Young people face persistent stereotypes and negative narratives about their role in adversity. They describe their exclusion as a form of structural and psychological violence that is indivisible from their political social, cultural, and economic disempowerment. Until they are supported and embraced as partners in responding to adversity instead of perpetrators or victims or passive beneficiaries, they will continue to internalize that narrative and limit themselves, not to mention the limits and barriers that they face in being excluded from decision-making and agenda-setting on issues that affect their daily lives. In this vein, we find the phrasing 'children in adversity' to be disempowering: one in four young people faces or is affected by violence, but 'children in adversity' gives the impression that they are a special type of victims. The need for agency, dignity, identity is just as critical for children in adversity as child protection and awareness of children's rights is.

According to these respondents, this failure to include young people's input will ultimately lead to the sector's failure to address the needs of children and young people fully.

A few respondents also identified the continued need for a holistic, child-focused response as being a major challenge (as was noted earlier). They noted that such an approach is extremely complex and resource-intensive, particularly within low-resource settings, and that such resources are not currently available. Other key challenges identified by the survey respondents include the following:

What are the major challenges and needs for children and youth facing adversity globally?

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Geopolitical challenges and shifts, resulting in increased trauma and risks for children and families

- Global migration and a rise in racism and xenophobia around the world. Children and young people on the move continue to lack access to protection and care, and face trauma. Migration puts children at risk (or at an increased risk) of economic or sexual exploitation, abuse, neglect, and violence, and lessens their ability to access health, education, protection, and social-welfare services. Thus, it is critical that the community becomes better at supporting children across the whole migration journey by addressing the factors pushing them to leave, providing support along the journey and in host communities, and working with those who return to their home communities.
- Climate change, including impact on migration, livelihoods, etc.
- A rise in poverty, inequity, and inequality among marginalized and vulnerable populations worldwide. Some groups of children remain entrenched in extreme poverty. Moreover, inequality is getting worse, with many children missing out on vital opportunities.
- A growth in populism and a decline in the space accorded to civil society, with many governments beginning to limit or even target civil society organizations (i.e., child-focused agencies in Pakistan being asked to leave). This makes it increasingly difficult for many NGOs to advocate for and implement programming targeting children and youth, especially if the issue areas being addressed are in any way controversial. Due to the potential risks involved, this also limits organizations' ability to advocate for children's and young people's participation in decision-making processes. Respondents also noted that young activists too face constraints on their ability to operate freely and safely. Such constraints can include prohibitions on formal registration, restrictions with regard to civic space, government repression, and other safety risks.

Donor and development-agency systems and institutions, leading to ineffectiveness in responding to the needs of children and young people

What are the major challenges and needs for children and youth facing adversity globally?

- Overreliance on NGOs to provide social-welfare services in low- and middle-income countries. Many governments still rely heavily on NGOs to provide general welfare and specialized services to vulnerable children and families. There is often no designated government agency that addresses referrals on child-protection issues, and government ministries often do not receive the funds necessary to carry out these services.
- Culture of dependency. As one respondent noted: "One significant challenge is that most development agencies I've worked with perpetuate dependency. I have seen countless examples in which assistance is provided and when external funding ends, much of the progress ends. Local receive superficial 'training' but often NOT the capacity, technology or resources to continue after the donors leave. We promote the development of underdevelopment."
- Lack of sustainability within aid systems.
- Donor priorities and competition for funding affects the scale and impact of the support work. There is a culture of competition between organizations, which often prevents resource sharing. This is partly fueled by donor's giving practices.
- Donor procedures impact organizations' ability to continue their work. Approval processes are often lengthy. For example, fulfilling donor reporting, meeting-attendance, and other demands can be challenging.
- NGOs continue to work outside of the system, with their own standards. For example, private-school staff members are not required to undergo background checks.
- Duplication of work due to projects being done (and funded) in isolation.

What are the major challenges and needs for children and youth facing adversity globally?

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- A need for more capacity-building and training for all staff members.
- Volunteerism. The reliance on volunteerism limits program sustainability, scale and leadership capacity. There is a need for continued awareness-raising around responsible volunteer practices.
- A need for global governance, leadership, and partnerships to extend reach beyond very small demonstration projects.
- A need to move beyond policy to program realization. Implementation and enforcement mechanisms are largely absent beyond scattered pilots and isolated good practices. When they do exist, most such mechanisms are far removed from the vast majority of children and youth who are experiencing the most severe forms of adversity. Rather, they operate at higher levels, barely touching the surface of the local systems that are most proximate to these children (at the community, family, and peer levels, for example). Programs operating at this elevated level tend to be just that – pilot projects or ad hoc programs that are rarely connected or supported by the systems meant to support them.
- A reluctance to speak to or attempt to address systemic drivers at all levels (e.g., poverty including child poverty; economic models that create poverty and exploitation, and which lead to environmental destruction, displacement, and a lack of social security) is leading to interventions that are too often divorced from reality, and which do no more than address “symptoms.” Except in a few instances, the focus today remains almost entirely on improving remedial interventions or on secondary/tertiary prevention. The current approach is generally focused on individual/group dysfunctions and pathologies (dysfunctional individuals, families, groups), and is limited to addressing functional issues in isolation (parenting interventions and cash transfers) instead of addressing the systemic barriers or challenges

faced by families and communities in caring for or protecting their children adequately. There has largely been a failure to articulate clear, rights-based, child- and family-centered economic and social policies that could begin to address vital issues in low- and middle-income countries such as universal health care, parental leave, early education, access to inclusive and high-quality primary and secondary education, or social-inclusion policies relevant to harmful norms and behavior. This lack has in turn led to ineffective and partial “remedies” rather than solutions. Children and youth in adversity are least likely to receive the support they need when they need it, as they tend to fall between the systems meant to support and protect them – that is, the family, the community, and the child-welfare, education, employment, justice, health, social-protection, and immigration systems. Such young people are often on the move (with or without their families), living or working on the streets, and outside households or in households that are disconnected from support systems. Bridging these systems, in effect by creating mechanisms able to function as wrap-around services or outreach opportunities, is the most important task, and yet it receives the least attention and funding.

- Lack of access to basic and universal services such as health care and education (including higher education and vocational training).
- Families are fractured and unsafe, leading to unnecessary family separations. Families continue to lack support, which results in more adversity both within and outside the home.
- Intergenerational family violence and abuse.
- Unemployment, including among youth.
- Obesity and other forms of chronic illness.

Challenges facing families and communities, leading to increased protection- and care-related risks for children and families

Issue areas where more work is needed, and which continue to represent challenges

- Raising the visibility of certain categories of children, while incorporating cross-cutting issues (e.g., youth, disability, gender).
- All forms of violence against children, including sexual exploitation, corporal punishment, child marriage, child labor, and slavery. Little progress has been made with regard to reducing violence against children – although the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children shows some promise, as does the increased cooperation on these issues. Without interventions to address the effects of violence, children and youth can face lasting damage to their psychological, biological, and emotional health that renders them unable to reach their full potential. Unaddressed violence thus undermines the impact of other development investments, as it is often an underlying factor behind poor outcomes in education, health, and other areas. Important to note here is that some categorize the different forms of violence against children identified above as subtopics of violence

prevention, while others treat them as separate issues.

- Children’s care and alternative care (including leaving care provision).
- Education. Even if children are in school, the quality of education is often low, with many schools lacking basic resources and well-trained teachers.

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For our community to have the positive impact we want, we must work to address and prevent violence against children and youth.

—Survey respondent

- Early childhood development.
- Children and armed conflict. Violations in the context of armed conflict, environments of impunity, and a general lack of accountability continue. State approaches to children returning from ISIS-controlled territory also pose a risk to children who were either recruited by armed groups or traveled with their families and are now returning home.
- Gaps in social services’ knowledge, attitudes, and practices with regard to providing equitable and effective services to certain groups of children.

This is particularly relevant for children on the move, children in conflict with the law, children in care, and children with disabilities. There is a need to provide frontline workers with more training, coaching, and mentoring.

- Children and the digital world. Children and young people are among the most active users of the internet. States are now developing the laws and regulations that will shape the online world and protect or neglect the full range of children’s rights online. This is a critical moment to ensure that the regulation of the digital world is compliant with human rights (and the rights of children).
- Counterterrorism surveillance and children. Counterterrorism measures are rapidly expanding, and may encompass surveillance measures, restrictions on behavior, detention powers, and the creation of hundreds of new criminal offenses. These measures generally do not target children specifically, but nonetheless dramatically impact children, particularly those from economically and socially disadvantaged backgrounds with certain religious or ethnic heritages.
- Access to justice. Progress has been made internationally in recognizing the challenges children face in accessing justice. In all countries, however, children continue to face justice systems that are poorly designed to meet their needs.

What are the major challenges and needs for children and youth facing adversity globally?

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What issue (specific to children and youth facing adversity) do you think will become more important in the coming years?

Migration and the growing number of children on the move

- Increasing movement on the part of children and young people. Such individuals may be trying to escape hazardous and dangerous environments but potentially putting themselves into risky and at times worse situations. For example, they may be responding to natural or human-made disasters, political upheaval, a lack of education and employment opportunities, or worsening safety and security due to violence in their communities and countries.
- The increasing prevalence of transnational families will lead to further pressure on existing services, making it more difficult for caregivers and kinship networks to access support in times of challenge or crises (however, this phenomenon can in some contexts also create new and positive support networks that transcend boundaries).

“
Migration is a problem and an opportunity that we're just not talking about enough!

—Survey respondent

“
Due to the protection risks involved with migration (both during the journey and once in the destination country), it will be important for the development community and governments to not only support children and families if they chose to migrate but to also further their work to address these push factors.

—Survey respondent

Climate change

What issue (specific to children and youth facing adversity) do you think will become more important in the coming years?

- The climate crisis affects the full range of human rights, from the right to life, survival, and development to the right to health and an adequate standard of living. Young people are and will continue to be disproportionately affected by the climate crisis. Moreover, its effects will become more severe in the coming years.
- Children's civil and political rights are becoming increasingly developed and more fully realized. However, this trend has yet to reach a critical mass. In the context of the climate crisis, children are also becoming more engaged in political activity. This expanding engagement by children and young people in civil and political life may act as a trigger for a more fundamental change in the way they are viewed, and for the realization of their civil and political rights.

IV

- Rising levels of inequality are likely to lead to increased marginalization and a growing inability to access the high-quality education, basic health care, technology, and meaningful livelihoods that enable children and young people to do more than survive.
- Increased attention must be paid to inclusion of overlooked population groups of children (such as LGBTI+ children and youth, and children and youth with disabilities).

Global inequality and inequity

Violence against children (including those who experience it directly and those who are exposed to it)

- The number of children experiencing or exposed to violence is rising. Consequently, there is concern that social welfare workers will not be adequately trained or supported in providing the types of interventions and support services needed.

Alternative care, children's care reforms, system changes, and deinstitutionalization

Children and technology

- Impact of the internet, social-media platforms, online exploitation, and surveillance.
- Responding to and reflecting new changes in technology and communication among young people will also become more important. For example, the use of bots and algorithms to promote hate speech and the use of artificial intelligence are becoming relevant issues.

Safeguarding

What issue (specific to children and youth facing adversity) do you think will become more important in the coming years?

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We haven't even begun to scratch the surface on how children are engaging, positively and negatively, with technology. We are so far behind the curve on this one!

—Survey respondent

IV

Insufficient data, hampering evidence-based approaches

- There are currently serious gaps in the data used to measure and address the SDGs.

Rights and degree of agency accorded to children, young people, and parents

- Children's voices have not been included in relevant dialogues, and there is concern that this will continue.
- "We have successfully promoted children's rights. We have done almost nothing to promote parents' rights. The field, certainly in high-income countries, will increasingly be focused on giving parents a voice and perhaps even a right in child welfare."
- The institutionalization of the Youth, Peace, and Security agenda (following UNSCR 2250 and 2419) will create challenges for child- and youth-led civil society groups. It will create pressures to standardize around and conform to the norms of international development. This can make it very difficult for children and youth to act organically in leadership positions.

Gender and sexuality

- These are important issues to address particularly as children begin to learn that these categories are much more fluid than much of the world thinks.

Prevention and holistic support to address the needs of children and young people

Social and emotional learning (SEL), particularly for youth and those on the move, will be an increasingly important issue and deserves more attention

- Following a major review of the evidence, the OECD has argued that the provision of SEL programs is a significant driver of success and well-being for individuals in the areas of education, employment, and well-being, and that social and emotional capabilities are a key skill for the 21st century.
- Youth who have not learned adequate social and emotional skills often struggle to reach their full potential. They are more likely to have children early and use drugs, and are less able to advocate for themselves effectively. SEL programs work to develop social and emotional competencies that enhance the protective factors enabling young people to be resilient

and develop skills that enable their participation as agents for positive social change.

- Positive outcomes from SEL programs include: improved conflict-resolution capabilities; improved peer relationships and connections; reductions in bullying; reduced substance abuse; reduced likelihood of developing anxiety and depression; improved self-esteem; decreased involvement in crime later in life; and improved well-being, life satisfaction, health, and educational achievement in adulthood.

What issue (specific to children and youth facing adversity) do you think will become more important in the coming years?

IV

What have been the major gaps in funding for children and youth facing adversity?

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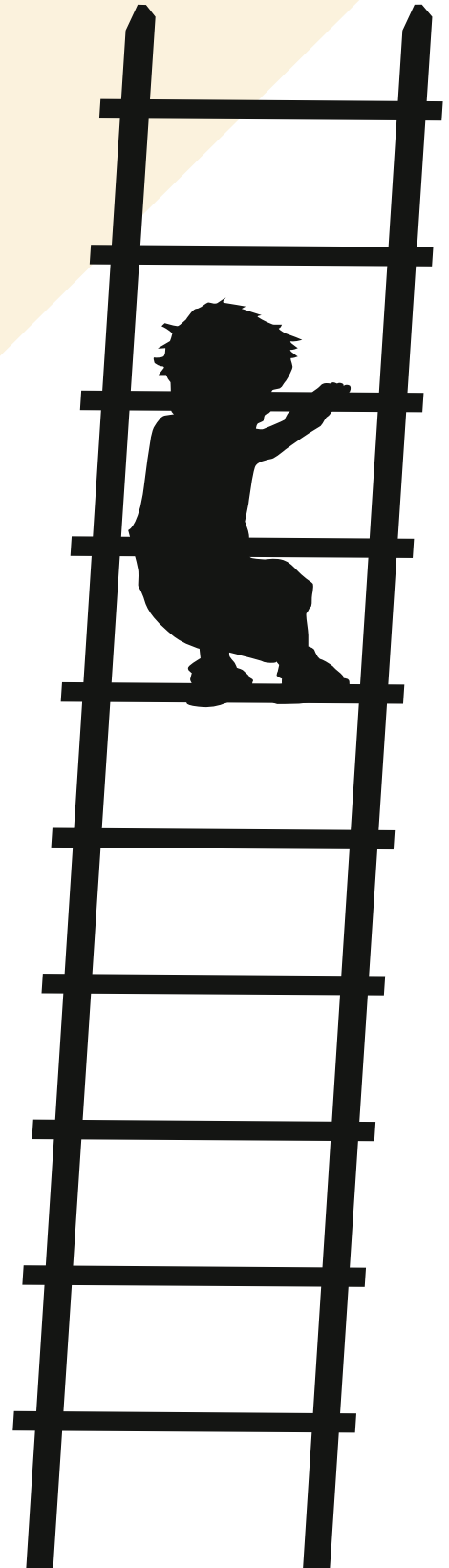
Everything! But especially everything outside of education. Seriously, though, if so much of the world's population is children, why do they get the dribblets of development funding?

—Survey respondent

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All issues beyond health...

—Survey respondent



Capacity-building and technical assistance

- Capacity-building and training for front-line workforces, as well as for government workers who have a mandate to support children and families facing adversity.

Monitoring and evaluation

- Implementation science around scaling evidence-based interventions and sustaining them with fidelity in fragile/low-resource settings for vulnerable children and families.
- Outcome evaluation. A rule of thumb is that evaluation should account for 5% of the project's cost.

Child-, youth-, and parent-led approaches

- Youth-led programming, advocacy, and informal groups of children and young people.
- Parent-led advocacy and programming.

What have been the major gaps in funding for children and youth facing adversity?

V

Policy, advocacy, and systems reform

- Advocacy and communication efforts to drive policy, behavioral, and social-norms changes.
- Advocacy to fund work on under-addressed issues, population groups, and specific countries that may be less attractive to donors.
- Country-level policy advocacy has been neglected by donors, even though experience has shown it can have a significant, sustainable impact for children. If legislative and government champions are found, important issues facing children can be addressed by those with the power to make lasting change, ultimately having a larger impact on more children than our individual interventions could possibly make.
- Increased government budgetary commitments to children and youth facing adversity.

Network building and collaboration

- Funding to encourage cross-sectoral approaches and holistic responses (collaboration with entities in sectors such as nutrition, health, education, child protection, water and sanitation, and early childhood).
- Coordination across migratory movements and types of migration. One crucial element of support includes local, national, and international initiatives that bring together actors and agencies working with and for children and youth in migration from across sectors and geographies. However, such initiatives are often underfunded.

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The good intention of those in power generally bring about change that will maintain the status quo by updating a bankrupt system of inequality. Only if parents, families and the targets of our interventions have power will systems fundamentally change.

—Survey respondent

Grassroots and case-management organizations

- Services and projects that engage both in case management and advocacy for and with children, youth, and families are crucial for protecting children and youth from violence but are often underfunded. Such organizations tend to understand the reality on the ground, and increase the trust felt by children, youth, and families for service providers and governments. Moreover, they are believable advocates themselves, and help develop and provide evidence for national and international advocacy efforts.
- Some respondents noted the disparity in funding levels between larger organizations and smaller (advocacy, human rights, or service-oriented) organizations. While the larger organizations are well placed to address the large-scale problems affecting children and young people, they are not as well placed with regard to addressing specific human-rights issues affecting children. For example, one respondent expressed concern that several small but highly effective organizations – the Global Initiative to End Corporal Punishment, Child Soldiers International, and Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict – have lost core sources of funding, and have either shut down or are struggling.

“Game-changing” grant

- Large, game-changing grants such as the MacArthur Foundation’s 100&Change are needed.

Specific population groups or issue areas were identified as facing funding shortfalls

- Efforts to strengthen child protection and child-protection systems.
- Prevention of violence against children (“Action on violence against children remains massively underfunded relative to the size of the problem”).
- Alternative care and children’s care.
- Child and family support services such as case management, substance-abuse prevention and treatment, legal services, shelters, and social and emotional learning skills.

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Recent report suggests that only 0.5% of humanitarian funding goes to child protection. Therefore, child protection actors are left to copy-paste basic programs that produces numbers to satisfy donors (mostly bilateral donors). This results in reluctance by child protection actors in thinking innovatively.

—Survey respondent

- Children and armed conflict, or those living in areas of humanitarian crisis.
- Children and young people with disabilities.
- Rights of LGBTI+ children and youth.
- People on the move (children, youth, and families).
- Highly marginalized children (“They are not seen as ‘value for money.’ Many donors prefer to fund big agencies with ‘high impact’ (big numbers) but this can skim the surface and miss those in greatest need”).
- Older children, adolescents, and youth (along with youth-led work).
- Early childhood development.
- New, emerging, or developing human-rights issues.

What have been the major gaps in funding for children and youth facing adversity?

V

What can foundations do more effectively in supporting you and your partners to carry out your work?

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Foundations are in a unique position for supporting innovative thinking and generation of public goods. They should use this position to support the sector to grow...

—Survey respondent



Survey respondents provided an array of recommendations with regard to how foundations could be more effective and supportive of implementing partners. Many of these recommendations were centered around:

- Taking more risks in how and where foundations provide funding.
- Thinking outside of the box, and more innovatively.
- Building relationships based on trust and transparency.
- Reducing the siloed nature of funding, while providing more funding to support and facilitate intersectionality.

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Let us take some risks. Some donations are so restricted that they inhibit innovation. Innovation happens on the edge of failure and success.

—Survey respondent

There was an overarching recommendation to increase funding and increase the number of funders that are investing in issues related to children and youth affected by adversity. Moreover, while more funding is certainly needed, there is also an urgent need for better coordination and collaboration between funders and funding mechanisms (“Coordinate with each other within a lengthened time frame”), and between funders and implementing organizations. Accordingly, there was a general call for donors to identify common ground where possible (e.g., through joint reporting, standardized M&E or reporting practices, or joint visits and calls). Improved coordination and collaboration among donors can in turn improve the efficiency and effectiveness of program delivery, while facilitating coordination among implementing organizations. Improved collaboration across all stakeholders can help to reduce duplication and competition for resources, improve outcomes, increase collective impact, and focus resources.

A few of the stakeholders also expressed concern regarding the continuous shifts in foundations’ grantmaking strategies. As one survey respondent noted, foundations should “refrain from radical shifts in priorities that leave grantees in dire straits.”

A few stakeholders highlighted the need to shift imbalances in the field by creating mechanisms to fund local organizations; encouraging sustainable, locally owned outcomes; and placing more focus on the needs and voices of children, youth, and parents in making funding decisions – that is, “to listen to children and young people and respond to their ideas.” There was a general call to expand the participation of children and young people in agenda-setting, decision-making, program-design, delivery, monitoring, and grant-evaluation activities. If this is to take place, there is need to increase direct (flexible) grants to youth-led initiatives and groups – “risk-taking grants to young people.” Accordingly, funders need to be more effective at building organizational capacities and supporting youth and youth-group networks. Funders additionally need to be better at incentivizing collaborative work for collective impact in which youth play a role as trusted partners.

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[We need] funding work to shift the systems that reinforce exclusion to inclusion, addressing structural barriers to limiting youth participation.”

—Survey respondent

What can foundations do more effectively in supporting you and your partners to carry out your work?

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The survey respondents offered the following recommendations for foundations:

Types and length of grant and reporting requirements

“*Simplified and similar funding application processes across funders would also enable organizations to spend more of their staff time on the issues they work on, rather than administration.*”

—Survey respondent

- Create common application and reporting requirements across foundations. Offer joint applications, standardized M&E and reporting practices, and joint visits and calls where possible.
- Make applications easier and simpler. Funding proposals often require input from multiple staff members, which takes “hours and hours” to complete and is so resource-intensive that it keeps staff from doing the “real work.” Measurements should be required that are genuinely useful to that specific donor.
- Use simplified, standardized, user-friendly, and more flexible reporting requirements to reduce the bureaucratic burden. Keep compliance requirements to a minimum – use annual or bi-annual reporting deadlines as a maximum, not more frequent periods.
- Increase availability of core, flexible, and unrestricted funding. This is critical for the survival of smaller grassroots and human-rights organizations, and would allow them to respond to emerging challenges and needs flexibly and innovatively. This would also allow organizations to maintain a “team of strong professionals.”
- Support volunteer and staff-welfare grants. Provide funding that supports volunteer and staff well-being and self-care. Include this in proposals and budgets, and flag this as an area of critical importance for existing and future grantees.
- Fund salaries. In order to build organizational capacity, there is a need to fund staff salaries. “Paying for salaries shows that funders understand that it takes people to deliver social welfare programs and services.”

“*Have a flexible value for money and an approach that takes into account the high costs associated with supporting children and young people in greatest need.*”

“*Funding unrestricted grants allows us to focus our efforts on the most needed work and typically allows us to pay people to do the work instead of just paying for tangibles like books, buildings and backpacks.*”

—Survey respondent

What can foundations do more effectively in supporting you and your partners to carry out your work?

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- Fund policy, advocacy, and lobbying initiatives. Research and experience in the sector have shown that policy advocacy and lobbying efforts focusing on governments at all levels help to create more lasting change. By securing government buy-in and support for programs addressing the issues identified, stakeholders are better able to ensure that the positive results of their interventions will be sustained long after they end their involvement.
- Fund networks, interagency collaborations, and existing structures that produce public goods, with the goal of enhancing coordination between stakeholders. Embrace the idea of supporting and funding networks, as well as those who are working to convene stakeholders. Networks working on these issues can play a very valuable role with regard to sharing and amplifying what is working for certain children in certain countries or contexts. “Institutional donors may be more risk-averse, but private donors can support such collaboration.”
- Fund long-term, multiyear grants which, according to some respondents should extend over three years or more, can give organizations more time to get their efforts underway, and to show the impact of their programming, service delivery, and systems change. The delivery of high-quality programming, impact, and change takes time to measure – “Systems change can take 15+ years.” There is a need to move beyond pilot projects, while still ensuring sustained funding for initiatives that have proven their value.
- Increase co-funding opportunities. Like-minded donors can co-fund programs and thus develop a holistic response, rather than working separately on specific issues and locations. This also allows the investment to continue even after one donor shuts down its funding.



Give us a little time to prove the connection between health and social services and humanitarian programs.

Monitoring, evaluation, and learning

- Invest in monitoring, evaluation, and capacity-building for those who deliver programs on the ground.
- Set safe metrics expectations. While it is extremely important for funders to have or support M&E practices able to measure the success of an investment, investors must also avoid setting metrics expectations that could harm the population groups being served. One example might be asking for monitoring and evaluation goals related to resettling (or reintegrating) a very specific number of children in a family per month. As one respondent stated, “This is not a metric that is good for the children. We do not want to rush a process for a child, which can put them in harm's way, in order to meet a metric goal.”
- Improve data-collection coordination, allowing collective impact to be measured.
- Conduct outcome evaluations. Ensure that all interventions funded include outcome evaluations.

What can foundations do more effectively in supporting you and your partners to carry out your work?

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Pulling Back the Curtain

December 2019

- Foundations can be a unique and powerful voice for sharing evidence and impactful interventions from the field with government and other stakeholders. Many government actors appreciate hearing from a variety of perspectives. By sharing and reinforcing the importance of the work being done by INGOs, foundations and other donors could potentially influence key legislators and government officials in ways that INGOs themselves are unable to do.
- Use qualitative as well as quantitative measurements. Shift to measurement practices that focus more heavily on qualitative data collection. It is difficult to measure impact when reporting mechanisms look only at numbers.
- Create innovative evaluation methods. Develop innovative methods of evaluation that do not rely on traditional program-evaluation methods. While technology can be incorporated to enhance these methods, funders should also support evidence-building and programmatic-innovation efforts (not just technology innovations).
- Fund promising long-term practices that facilitate learning and the documentation of promising activities.
- Leverage investments more effectively by requiring programmatic organizations to contribute clear documentation and evidence of lessons learned that can be shared through global knowledge-sharing platforms.
- Invest in implementation science: There is a need for more implementation science on evidence-based interventions, and for a greater understanding of the importance of quality and evidence from the outset. Similarly, there is a need for greater understanding of the kind of partnerships that allow evidence-based interventions to reach greater scale and be sustained. Gaps with regard to achieving the MDGs can in some cases be explained by the low quality of actual interventions. For example, while the number of children in schools was increased, the reality was that many of these children were not learning even while in classrooms.

Safeguarding

- Invest in capacity-building for safeguarding and child protection. Allow applicants to budget adequately for capacity-building in the area of safeguarding. Larger organizations are being approached to train and support smaller organizations in these areas, but often lack sufficient resources. If

these larger organizations are provided with sufficient funding, they will be able to provide contextually relevant safeguarding training and support to other entities in different locations, even if these latter entities do not themselves have the money to pay for these services.

- Be careful of short-term-oriented rhetoric and so-called quick fixes with regard to safeguarding. Avoid messages about safeguarding that serve only as rhetoric, and are not translated into the resources (people, time, and money) needed to strengthen organizations in this area. Stakeholders, particularly donors, often think that “quick fixes” (e-learning, a quick organizational audit, a new policy) will be enough, when in fact changes in organizational cultures and social norms are needed to better protect children and young people.

What can foundations do more effectively in supporting you and your partners to carry out your work?

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Playing a bigger role in raising awareness of the issues and of supported organizations

- Foundations can bring together like-minded organizations. In this way, a variety of actors can convene to discuss important issues, share programming, and identify future grantmaking and sectoral priorities. Funders can facilitate collaborative partnerships among grantees and other stakeholders.
- Foundations can serve as a nexus for knowledge management, information sharing, and learning. They can share promising practices, successful strategies, research, and lessons learned from past funding efforts and investments. They can also share project-proposal development skills and knowledge (in particular with smaller

organizations). Finally, they must use technology (e.g., open-sourced databases) to expand networks and share best practices, thereby increasing access to information for smaller or remote organizations. All of these practices could facilitate the sharing of ideas, research, projects, and findings, which could in turn help to identify and scale up successful interventions. For example, one respondent found ECFG's overview and analysis of U.S. government funding for children and youth to be incredibly helpful, since it broke down the budget in a digestible way. This allowed them to target their budget advocacy more effectively.

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Foundations are some of the rare entities that can be activists and can, in many ways, fund items that may seem niche to more conventional funders but are, in fact, central to children's lives. Be rebels! Inspire others!

—Survey respondent

What can foundations do more effectively in supporting you and your partners to carry out your work?

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If you are interested in learning more about joining ECFG,
please reach out to the Secretariat at
info@elevatechildren.org