

**ANNUAL REPORT TO CONGRESS:  
ADVANCING PROTECTION AND CARE FOR  
CHILDREN IN ADVERSITY**

Fiscal Year 2020

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## **Message from the Acting U.S. Government Special Advisor on Children in Adversity**

Dear Colleagues,

On behalf of the U.S. government (USG) departments and agencies that provide assistance to highly vulnerable children around the world, I am happy to submit the 13th *Annual Report to Congress on Advancing Protection and Care for Children in Adversity*. The report is submitted pursuant to Public Law 109-95: Assistance for Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children in Developing Countries Act of 2005. This report covers progress and results by USG partners from October 1, 2019, to September 30, 2020, and other key achievements to date.

The COVID-19 pandemic enormously impacted children and remains a key concern for the USG. Despite these challenges, programs continue to operate and adapt to ever-changing conditions, demonstrating extraordinary achievements to protect and care for children and families around the world. Prior USG investments also created a foundation that encouraged governments to consider child-protection issues and family strengthening in their responses to the pandemic. This report outlines many of these COVID-19-related efforts.

We welcome the enactment of the [Global Child Thrive Act](#), in January 2021. The law furthers the mandate to address the first objective of the [Advancing Protection and Care for Children in Adversity \(APCCA\) Strategy](#), “Build Strong Beginnings,” by strengthening USG policy support for early childhood development (ECD) in relevant foreign assistance programs. In addition to the five USG departments and agencies currently participating in the *APCCA Strategy*, the Global Child Thrive Act directs the Departments of Agriculture, Defense, Education, and the Treasury, as well as the Millennium Challenge Corporation, to incorporate and promote ECD activities. We are continuing to build on existing ECD programming, collaborating with additional departments and agencies, and look forward to reporting key accomplishments in future APCCA reports to Congress.

Thank you for your continued support for the USG’s efforts to assist the world’s most vulnerable children and their families.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Levy  
Acting U.S. Government Special Advisor on Children in Adversity

## U.S. Government Departments and Agencies That Contribute to Advancing Protection and Care for Children in Adversity: A U.S. Government Strategy for International Assistance (2019–2023)



## Introduction

In 2005, the U.S. Congress recognized the importance of a whole-of-government response to the world's most vulnerable children when it passed Public Law 109-95: The Assistance for Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children in Developing Countries Act. This Act requires an interagency strategy to promote a comprehensive, coordinated, and effective U.S. government (USG) response to the urgent needs of the world's most vulnerable children. In June 2019, USG partners launched [\*Advancing Protection and Care for Children in Adversity: A U.S. Government Strategy for International Assistance \(2019–2023\)\*](#), or *APCCA Strategy*, which outlines the USG's approach to investing in the development, care, dignity, and safety of the world's most vulnerable children and their families. USG partners involved in implementing the *APCCA Strategy* include the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services (HHS), Labor (DOL), State (DOS); the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID); and the Peace Corps.

This report highlights collaboration among USG interagency partners, as well as progress and achievements in fiscal year (FY) 2020 on the *APCCA Strategy*'s three strategic objectives and guiding principles. Most programs target multiple needs and support the realization of all objectives yet highlights are reported by objective in this report. This report also features progress made on several cross-cutting areas identified in the [\*Implementation Plan\*](#) for the *APCCA Strategy*: increasing knowledge, capacity, and policies on child safeguarding and protection; investing in strategies to support the social-service workforce; and promoting positive parenting and family-strengthening programs. Appendix A provides more detailed achievements by department and agency.

The newly enacted Global Child Thrive Act, effective January 2021, also calls for the USG to report on efforts to advance early childhood development (ECD) internationally. Highlights from activities in line with the Global Child Thrive Act are described in the section on Objective One: "Build Strong Beginnings."

Despite the enormous challenges for ongoing programs presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, USG foreign assistance continued to promote healthy development within safe and protective families in 108 countries in FY 2020 by:

- Providing 27,756,461 children with services such as family tracing and reunification or other child development, protection, safety, and well-being services;
- Providing 1,797,650 parents or caregivers with services such as psychosocial support and training in positive parenting practices;
- Training 400,527 service providers to deliver high-quality services to vulnerable children and their families; and
- Strengthening the capacity of 922 governmental and nongovernmental organizations to provide services and support to children and their families.

See Appendix B for detailed data on the services and support provided to children and their families in FY 2020.

## U.S. Government Response to Protecting and Caring for Children During the COVID-19 Pandemic

As COVID-19 spread around the world, the pandemic resulted in the deaths of parents and caregivers, as well as increased risks to the safety and well-being of children, including interruptions to health services; exposure to violence, abuse, exploitation, and neglect; decreased essential services; often severe hunger and nutritional deprivation; increased rates of child, early, and forced marriage; increased rates of female genital mutilation/cutting; diminished livelihoods and increased care burdens; disruptions in and loss of education that disproportionately affect girls; as well as psychosocial distress. The COVID-19 pandemic also renewed and expanded evidence demonstrating how critical the role is that schools and educators play in protecting children and supporting families, particularly during crises.

Since the pandemic began, the APCCA Interagency Working Group has played a leadership role in providing guidance, technical assistance, and advocacy to incorporate the protection and care needs of children into COVID-19 response. In spring 2020, the U.S. Government Special Advisor on Children in Adversity issued an internal guidance note, “Child Protection Resources and Answers to Frequently Asked Questions on COVID-19,” to inform USG programming and response under the *APCCA Strategy*. The guidance promotes the integration of child protection activities across sectors; advocates for social work and child protection posts in hospitals, clinics, and other response centers; prioritizes the development of procedures and systems to identify and provide care for children who are separated from or lose parents or caregivers as a result of COVID-19; and supports the development of tools to strengthen family and caregiving environments. In summer 2021, the APCCA Interagency Working Group issued an updated [guidance note](#),<sup>1</sup> with a particular focus on addressing the issues facing the more than 5 million children who have lost a parent or caregiver.

APCCA colleagues also played key roles in promoting technical best practices for child protection during the COVID-19 pandemic. At the 2021 Global Health Science and Practice Technical Exchange, APCCA colleagues presented ways child protection programming can prevent and mitigate COVID-19 impacts. In November 2020, USAID’s Bureau for Resilience and Food Security (RFS) led the development of sessions focused on the impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable children and families at the Information and Communication Technology for Agriculture Development (ICTforAg) Conference, attended by people around the globe. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and USAID supported the development of parenting tips addressing Mitigation of Second Order Impacts of COVID-19, which are available on the [CDC global resources website](#). These tips were translated into more than 100 languages and reached more than [193 million people](#).<sup>2</sup> Lastly, a number of Institutes and Centers of the National Institutes of Health funded research to understand the effects of COVID-19 infections in children, including the [Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human](#)

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.usaid.gov/documents/us-government-guidance-note-critical-action-protection-and-care-children-adversity-0>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.covid19parenting.com/home>.

[Development](#), [National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases](#) (NIAID), [National Institute of Mental Health](#), and the [Fogarty International Center](#).

Through FY 2020 programming, the USG worked to intensify programmatic efforts around child protection.

For example:

- In **Ethiopia** and **Eswatini**, the CDC, with funding from the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), is enhancing Violence Against Children Survey (VACS) questionnaires to measure the impacts of the pandemic on children. During the pandemic, VACS data helped governments develop National Action Plans, identify priority programs and supports, and define monitoring and evaluation strategies based on evidence.
- In **Mexico**, the U.S. Department of Labor funded communications, including leaflets, posters, and radio broadcasts, to explain the risks of COVID-19 to children and families working on sugar and coffee farms in remote communities.
- In **Rwanda**, USAID partners adapted a nurturing care program to conduct remote programming via radio and phone. Partners revised 17 pre-existing radio scripts to add COVID-19-specific messages, such as what to do if parents suspect they or their children have coronavirus; tips for seeking prompt care; handwashing; caregiver mental health, well-being, and self-care; debunking myths on COVID-19 (particularly on breastfeeding); and maintaining and promoting nurturing care during COVID-19. In October 2020, eight radio stations, including the national Radio Rwanda, began airing these adapted sessions countrywide.
- PEPFAR Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) programs adapted to COVID-19 by rapidly shifting to remote case management, while prioritizing in-person support for children and adolescents needing HIV treatment, as well as those who had experienced violence. During remote interactions, case managers educated children and families on COVID-19 prevention, violence prevention, and parenting. PEPFAR partners also provided basic water, sanitation, and hygiene kits to families and connected them with cash grants and food assistance according to their need.
  - For example, in **Côte d’Ivoire**, PEPFAR worked with local leaders in each district to ensure OVC program families’ eligibility to receive government financial support.
  - PEPFAR partners in **Kenya** and **Uganda** created multidisciplinary teams to continue support of critical HIV prevention and treatment services for children enrolled in the OVC program.
- In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Peace Corps evacuated Volunteers from all posts in March 2020. However, staff developed creative ways to continue programs and

to support all three APCCA objectives. For example, in **Uganda**, staff have been working closely with ten local nongovernmental organizations and intend to collaborate with five more organizations on a variety of activities, including mosquito-net distribution targeting OVCs, as well as establishing shelters for survivors of gender-based violence (GBV).

- In the **education sector**, USAID worked to mitigate the impact of national school closures and associated risks on children. In 30 countries, USAID education programs equipped educators and caregivers with knowledge, skills, and resources to support the psychosocial well-being of children and youth during the uncertain and unpredictable COVID pandemic. In 52 countries, USAID supported partners in deploying a variety of distance-learning modalities to keep children and youth engaged and to limit learning loss. For example, in **Senegal**, USAID supported the Ministry of National Education in developing and disseminating radio- and television-based educational content so students could continue learning from home. The program created a one-stop shop for teachers to gain access to distance learning resources from home and provided ongoing support through text messages. In addition, USAID developed a Return to Learning Toolkit, which provided comprehensive guidance on the safe and responsible opening of schools, as deemed appropriate.



## Fiscal Year 2020 Highlights

### Objective One: Build Strong Beginnings

USAID leads interagency implementation of the *APCCA Strategy*. Below are FY 2020 highlights of USG programs in alignment with the first objective of the *APCCA Strategy*, “Build Strong Beginnings.” Additional information about programming by department and agency can be found in Appendix A.

#### Integrating a Nurturing Care Approach

Nurturing care refers to conditions that enable communities and caregivers to promote children’s good health and nutrition, protect them from threats, and give young children opportunities for early learning through emotionally supportive and responsive interactions. USG agencies and departments advanced the provision of nurturing care, which is critical to promoting ECD, in myriad ways in FY 2020.

In Cambodia, Rwanda, and Mozambique, USAID supports caregivers in providing nurturing care as part of inclusive and integrated ECD and nutrition programming. The programs improve children’s outcomes by focusing on strengthening caregiver knowledge and provision of responsive care and early learning, and by strengthening the enabling environment for ECD at the national and subnational levels. In addition, in Mozambique, USAID supports validation of the Global Scale for Early Development—a World Health Organization (WHO) tool to measure the number of young children (0–3 years old) developmentally on track.

NIH-funded child development research often informs other USG programs aimed at benefiting at-risk children around the globe. One such study investigates whether micronutrient supplementation during pregnancy and in early childhood might mitigate the effects of malnutrition on later health outcomes. Several NIH Institutes fund research on how schools can help address the health care needs, including mental health, of schoolchildren and adolescents.

Keys to advancing a child’s health and development include promoting hygiene practices to minimize infections, strengthening preventive health care, and ensuring that parents and caregivers seek care and treatment for children’s illnesses in appropriate ways. In 2020 alone, USAID Bureau of Global Health (GH) partners helped more than 92 million women and children access essential—and often lifesaving—care. GH funded WHO to examine evidence-based approaches to monitoring individual children’s development in primary care services. These efforts informed the [Nurturing Care Handbook](#), as well as the design of the draft practice guide for strengthening health and nutrition services, which includes messages on responsive caregiving. GH also collaborated with WHO to develop new standards for providing quality care to small and sick newborns, including nurturing care, with specific focus on nutrition, pain management, warmth, and safeguarding sleep.

Nurturing care is also a key component of Advancing Nutrition, USAID’s global multi-sectoral nutrition program. In addition to developing responsive care and early learning counseling cards

to integrate into existing country infant and young children feeding counseling cards used globally, USAID is supporting guidance on improving nutritional care for children with developmental disabilities. USAID is also collaborating to fill a gap in understanding among implementers, researchers, and funders on the experience of frontline workers and caregivers in delivering and receiving, respectively, integrated services to bolster ECD outcomes in children.

### Strengthening Parenting Skills

In FY 2020, the USG prioritized strengthening parenting skills to advance ECD. In Rwanda and Senegal, USAID funded the Responsible, Engaged and Loving Fathers Initiative to build young fathers' positive and nonviolent engagement in caring for their young children and promote improved couples' relationships. Also in Rwanda, USAID is part of a public- and private-sector partnership to promote ECD, positive parent-child relationships, and overall healthy child development. Activities include home visitation to support playful parenting, father engagement, improved nutrition, care seeking, and family functioning. Among the 1,049 families that participated in the pilot of this activity, parents used more positive parenting techniques; children's health and development outcomes and families' mental health improved; and families experienced less violence, including intimate-partner violence and harsh discipline. With USAID funds and other donor support, partners expanded this program to reach an additional 10,000 Rwandan households in 2020. In Uganda, the Mama Ambassador Program improves the health and ECD of babies and the physical, emotional, and psychological health and well-being of their adolescent mothers.

Furthermore, the DOS Office of the U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator and Health Diplomacy leads the implementation of PEPFAR programs to strengthen OVC caregivers' ECD knowledge and skills. For example, the CDC, with PEPFAR funding, worked with the Ugandan Ministry of Health to establish ECD spaces for children affected by HIV and to integrate ECD into group antenatal and postnatal care curricula for infants of adolescent mothers. In Tanzania, PEPFAR-funded implementing partners are strengthening OVC caregivers' knowledge and skills in ECD, including emphasizing the importance of early stimulation.

### Coordination Between Humanitarian and Development Actors

The COVID-19 global pandemic underlines the need for close collaboration between humanitarian and development efforts to advance ECD. In FY 2020, USAID's Center for Education (USAID/DDI/EDU) continued to partner with the LEGO Foundation to champion learning through play for children in crisis and conflict, with holistic programming that builds children's social and emotional skills. As a result, USAID and the LEGO Foundation jointly pledged \$12.5 million to increase investment in ECD in emergency settings. In September 2020, USAID broadened its partnership with the LEGO Foundation to share learning on early childhood education, increase co-funding in learning through play and social and emotional learning, and collaborate on investments in learning through play and early childhood education.

### Early Childhood Education

Additionally, the USAID pre-primary education working group developed a number of technical products, including a technical note and literature review, to support the design of high-quality early learning programs for children ages three to six. USAID is also conducting research to fill gaps in evidence-based best practices for implementing high-quality, inclusive pre-primary curriculum in Lower and Middle Income Contexts (LMICs), and is currently developing technical information about integrating the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) into pre-primary instruction.

## Objective Two: Put Family First

An estimated 5.2 million children lost a parent or caregiver as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>3</sup> To counter these effects and avoid further adversity, the USG global response must be guided by the *APCCA Strategy* and its “Put Family First” objective by supporting and preserving family care and reuniting separated children with their families or placing them in nurturing, loving, protective, and permanent family care. Below are FY 2020 highlights of USG programs in alignment with the second objective of the *APCCA Strategy*, “Put Family First.” Find additional information about programming, organized by department and agency, in Appendix A.

### Strengthening Families

The USG funds household strengthening activities key to preventing unnecessary child-family separation, which often occurs due to poverty and other stressors. In FY 2020, USAID’s Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) supported reuniting unaccompanied and separated children with their families. It also educated families on the needs of children, including offering contextualized parenting skills curricula for caregivers of children associated with armed forces and armed groups, and for caregiving amid COVID-19-related restrictions, closures, and fears, which added to humanitarian needs. USAID’s Center for Education supported disability inclusive education for children that helps children stay with their families while attending school rather than moving to residential care institutions to gain access to education.

Likewise, PEPFAR OVC programs provided household economic strengthening, health, and school access programs to reduce stress on families and empower them to provide for their children’s essential needs. For example, PEPFAR OVC programs implemented evidence-based programs to strengthen parenting skills, such as Parenting for Lifelong Health and Families Matter! In South Africa, USAID, with PEPFAR funds, supported increased access to legal documentation and assistance related to guardianship, civil registration, and inheritance. Peace Corps Volunteers worked collectively to build household resilience by promoting financial literacy, savings, and income generating projects with both caregivers and older adolescents.

### Supporting Family-Based Care

APCCA Partners played key roles in supporting family-based care for children in adversity. Through the Vulnerable Children directive, USAID funded family strengthening, family reunification, and family-based alternative care programming. In Rwanda, a USAID-funded project continued to work with the Government of Rwanda on deploying 30 social service professionals to each district, along with ongoing training for the cadre of nearly 30,000 community-level paraprofessionals who act as the first line of child protection and family strengthening.

With DOS Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration funding, implementing partners in Ethiopia supported the protection of and alternative care arrangements for unaccompanied and

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<sup>3</sup> <https://time.com/6111902/covid-orphans-coping/>

separated children, with the long-term goal to place more children in family-based care, reduce the number of children living in residential care, and transform such care to interim family-like environments while working to reunite families. Following a market assessment of the cash value provided to foster families, partners increased this incentive for the first time in five years. At the end of October 2020, the number of children residing in community care was the lowest it had been since the communal care model began in 2010.

The DOS Bureau of Consular Affairs' Office of Children's Issues (DOS/CA/OCS/CI) develops and implements intercountry adoption policy for the Department of State, ensuring that intercountry adoption is in the best interest of each child after first fully exploring domestic options. Despite COVID-19 constraints, DOS/CA/OCS/CI increased its engagement with foreign child welfare authorities, domestic stakeholders, and the Hague Conference on Private International Law to facilitate adoption processing wherever possible, consistent with local laws and regulations. When international border closures began in March 2020, the Department assisted 57 families that were already overseas with finalizing their adoption processes and returning safely to the United States with their adopted children.

### Promoting Care Reform

In FY 2020, USAID, through PEPFAR funds, supported the Government of the Republic of South Africa in developing a care and protection policy, improving the availability of family-based alternative care, and strengthening child protection systems. Through the Vulnerable Children directive, USAID funded activities to build sustainable national child protection and care systems in Armenia, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guatemala, Kenya, Moldova, Rwanda, and Uganda.

USAID's Changing the Way We Care Global Development Alliance supported safe and nurturing family care for children previously living in institutions and children at risk of separating from their families in Guatemala, Kenya, and Moldova. Through the alliance, 795 caregivers received support and 941 children were reunited with their families, placed in family-based care or independent living situations, or received after care support. USAID also supported online training for more than 200 orphanage managers and local practitioners around the world who wanted to transition their programs so they could support children in returning to family care in communities. With support from the Changing the Way We Care Alliance, the Better Care Network accelerated broad-based global momentum for family-based care for children through the recently mobilized Transforming Children's Care Collaborative Platform. This new Platform combines country-level care reform with international and regional advocacy to achieve global change.

In March 2021, USAID launched its first Care Leaders Council of young adults from around the world who have lived in alternative care ("care leavers") and also have professional experience in care reform. The aim is to engage directly with young leaders who have experience living in institutional or foster care to better inform programs, strengthen Council members' advocacy for care reform in their home countries, and increase the knowledge and skills of a new generation of care reform leaders. USAID is committed to engaging these young leaders in a manner that is

respectful and empowering, is sensitive to their experiences, recognizes their knowledge and expertise, and creates opportunities for them to advocate for change in care systems.

### Objective Three: Protect Children from Violence

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted children's lives, bringing an increased risk of exposure to violence in many forms for women, children, and youth. Education shifted to digital platforms and parents lost child care, resulting in children and youth spending more time online and thus facing increased risk of exposure to digital violence and harm. More alarming, reports of violence in the home increased as parents came under greater stress while coping with lockdown conditions and economic insecurity. Throughout FY 2020, the USG amplified its efforts to respond to and prevent violence against children. Below are FY 2020 highlights of USG programs in alignment with the third objective of the *APCCA Strategy*, Protect Children from Violence. Find additional information about programming, organized by department and agency, in Appendix A.

#### Prevention of Digital Harm

Children who are vulnerable in physical spaces are equally vulnerable in the digital world. USAID's [\*Digital Strategy\*](#), launched in 2020, strives to achieve and sustain open, secure, and inclusive digital ecosystems that contribute to development and humanitarian assistance outcomes and increase partner countries' self-reliance. Under the *APCCA Strategy* and USAID's *Digital Strategy*, USAID commits to helping children and youth safely navigate digital ecosystems through the Protecting Children from Digital Harm Initiative. In implementing these strategies, USAID is developing guidelines and raising awareness of the types of digital harm children and youth face and showcasing how USAID programs can help prevent and respond to this harm. Also in 2020, USAID launched its first Digital Youth Council, with members from ten countries, to incorporate youth voices in implementing the USAID *Digital Strategy* objective to protect children and youth from digital harm. This Council also will strengthen the professional capacity of a generation of digital change-makers and advocates.

#### Violence Against Children Surveys

As of December 2020, 22 countries had received complete data from the Violence Against Children Surveys (VACS), thanks to interagency collaboration among PEPFAR, DOS, CDC, and USAID. In FY 2020, the USG funded VACS in five additional countries (Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Lesotho, and Moldova) to compile complete, timely data to inform national actions to prevent violence. Using a variety of virtual technologies, the USG completed these VACS during the COVID-19 pandemic through innovative programming that upheld data efficiency and quality. In FY 2020, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia and Zimbabwe also transitioned to activities aimed at strengthening processes for developing national action plans, convening key stakeholders and increasing government capacity to address violence against children. USG-funded activities employed VACS data to inform policies tested in multiple settings and implemented through a variety of virtual adaptations. Additionally, the CDC led the development of an implementation guidance document and a revised questionnaire for implementing VACS in humanitarian settings.

In Colombia, USG Partners and key international stakeholders are working with the Government of Colombia to develop an evidence-based national action plan (NAP). This NAP, built from the VACS data, identifies and maps 132 programs, establishes measurable goals and indicators, and develops 32 subnational action plans addressing state-level (department) priorities. Additionally, as a result of this collaboration, the Government of Colombia hosted a VACS South American Regional course focused on the [INSPIRE package for ending violence against children](#). This approach focused on establishing local country support at the presidential level through the Office of the First Lady with ongoing, transparent collaboration with both international and national institutions. This interinstitutional collaborative approach in Colombia will serve as a model for post-VACS work in other countries.

### Child Protection

In FY 2020, USAID's BHA funded 227 awards that included protection activities, of which 74 supported field-level child protection and six contributed to global research, policy, and capacity-building for child protection in emergencies. These interventions supported more than 1.7 million people in 27 countries. The programs aimed to keep children safe in their communities by establishing community-based child protection mechanisms, parenting skills training, structured recreational and educational activities through child-friendly spaces, safe healing and learning spaces for adolescents, child protection case management, counseling and psychosocial support, and family tracing and reunification for unaccompanied and separated children. Additionally, BHA's global programs address critical gaps in child protection programming, supporting initiatives such as guidance on programming with girls associated with armed forces, development of child well-being indicators, and guidance on coordinated programming for child survivors of sexual violence.

USAID's Bureaus for Africa; Development, Democracy, and Innovation (DDI); and Global Health partnered to tackle the common root causes and social motivators that drive child, early, and forced marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting in northern Kenya. USAID built the capacity of 274 community child protection champions and revitalized and strengthened four area advisory councils and four community-based organizations responsible for advocacy on child protection, child rights, gender equality, and health rights. USAID also established two new child protection units.

Through the Bureau of International Labor Affairs' Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor and Human Trafficking, the U.S. Department of Labor awarded over \$25 million in new grants to combat child labor and forced labor in seven countries in FY 2020. Among other objectives, these projects will help increase vulnerable children's access to education and their families' access to financial assistance, thereby reducing reliance on child labor. At the national, district, and community levels, these projects will help strengthen systems and services that prevent and reduce child labor and forced labor and enable those who have been exploited to build new futures for themselves and their families.

### Investing in Youth, Families, and Communities

USAID-funded programs work to strengthen families and increase youth resilience. For example, in the Dominican Republic, USAID helped youth networks design and execute crime and violence prevention plans. Eleven youth networks presented their plans to authorities, including police chiefs, judges, and justice department representatives, then implemented conflict resolution and health and safety activities in their communities. To provide youth with more representation in public oversight and advocacy in the Dominican Republic, USAID trained 155 young civil society organization members, with a focus on gender-based violence, conflict resolution, and violence prevention.

In FY 2020, PEPFAR funding supported a variety of child protection initiatives aimed at strengthening families through community partnerships. For example, PEPFAR trained faith and community leaders in ten countries on child safeguarding practices and sexual violence against children, including mapping relevant sectors, actors, and processes to respond to violence against children. PEPFAR funding also supported mental health programming, such as in Zambia, with a simple, cost-effective, evidence-based program that aims to improve the mental health of women and girls. Peace Corps Volunteers funded by PEPFAR focus specifically on preventing violence and the core drivers of violence, namely gender inequity and harmful gender norms. In FY 2020, Volunteers reported reaching more than 20,000 participants through an activity addressing gender norms.



## **In the Spotlight: Increasing Knowledge, Capacity, and Policies on Child Safeguarding and Child Protection**

In fall 2020, the APCCA Secretariat launched a sub-working group on child safeguarding, co-chaired by USAID and the Department of State. With the assistance of the consulting partner Keeping Children Safe, this sub-working group is reviewing current USG child safeguarding policies, recommending guiding principles on child safeguarding for the USG, and developing training that could be adapted to the country context and type of programming and used across the interagency. The sub-working group, with representation from participating APCCA departments and agencies, will pilot training materials to strengthen understanding of child safeguarding issues and highlight how the USG can better safeguard children and youth in its programs.

The APCCA Secretariat also worked with USAID's Action Alliance to Prevent Sexual Misconduct to develop the new Agency [Guidance on Child Safeguarding for Implementing Partners](#). This guidance envisions a collaborative effort to protect children from abuse, exploitation, or neglect in any USAID-funded program by increasing partners' awareness of practical steps to prevent, stop, and respond to child abuse, exploitation, and neglect. The guidance provides basic information on the content and application of USAID's mandatory child safeguarding requirements that are included in all grants and contracts regardless of the type of program. USAID's Africa Bureau is also developing a virtual training course to strengthen knowledge and understanding of safe learning environments, child protection, and child safeguarding practices within the education sector to enhance USAID staff's capacity to design, implement, and monitor and evaluate education activities.

**Appendices**

Appendix A: [Additional Department and Agency Progress and Results](#)

Appendix B: [System for Monitoring and Evaluating the \*APCCA Strategy\*](#)