

CHILDHOOD

WORLD CHILDHOOD FOUNDATION

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Identities Under Siege: Rethinking the Protection of LGBTQ+ Children and Youth

Evaluation of World Childhood Foundation's
work with LGBTQ+ Children and Youth

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Executive Summary (REVISED & FINAL VERSION)

Purpose of the Study

This study evaluates the World Childhood Foundation's (Childhood) groundbreaking efforts to protect LGBTQ+ children and youth from sexual abuse and violence. It focuses on projects in Cambodia, Moldova, Poland, Sweden, and Ukraine between 2018 and 2024, and explores broader global geo-political dynamics shaping the field. The study reflects on the six years of programmatic work, identifies successes and challenges, and offers strategic recommendations.

The study used a participatory approach to address the following core research questions:

- Have Childhood-funded projects improved protection for LGBTQ+ children and youth?
- What lessons have emerged from collaboration between LGBTQ+ and children's rights sectors?
- How have socio-political and funding shifts impacted this work?
- What are the gaps and recommendations moving forward?

Key Findings

Global Context: Weaponization of Children's Rights and Funding Shifts

- LGBTQ+ children and youth face extreme vulnerability, including discrimination, violence, family rejection, homelessness, and lack of services.
- A growing powerful, transnational anti-gender ideology movement is weaponizing child protection and children's rights rhetoric to suppress LGBTQ+, women, and girls' rights.
- There is a global funding crisis, worsened by US foreign aid cuts, European austerity measures, and shrinking philanthropic support—disproportionately harming LGBTQ+ organizations and programs.

Impact of World Childhood Foundation's Investments

- Childhood is among the few children's donors prioritizing LGBTQ+ children and youth.
- Childhood is widely praised for its flexibility, partnership approach, and strong safeguarding focus. Flexible funding enabled Childhood grantees to adapt to restrictive environments.
- **Projects led to:**
 - Increased safeguarding and child protection capacity within LGBTQ+ NGOs.
 - Greater awareness of LGBTQ+ issues within child rights organizations.
 - Improved research and data on LGBTQ+ children and youth within the five countries.
 - New partnerships with schools, parents, and government departments.
 - Creation of child- and LGBTQ+-friendly online platforms.

- **Following promising practices emerged:**
 - Cross-sector collaboration between child rights and LGBTQ+ organizations yielded mutual capacity-building.
 - Parents' support networks played a pivotal role in advocacy. Engaging parents as allies is a powerful tool against stigma and marginalization.
 - Safe, affirming online spaces emerged as crucial for LGBTQ+ youth well-being. Online outreach and safe digital platforms are essential support systems.

Challenges

- Deep, persistent stigma and the weaponization of LGBTQ+ identities make open discussion of childhood sexual abuse complex and risky within the five countries.
- Rise of authoritarianism and anti-gender ideology globally impinged progress for the LGBTQ+ community. LGBTQ+ NGOs are under-resourced and operate in hostile environments.
- Projects faced context specific challenges, COVID and invasion of Ukraine by Russia.
- Continued separation of the children's rights and LGBTQ+ communities, leading to challenges to cross-sectoral partnerships; resistance by children's rights organizations to learning from LGBTQ+ NGOs; children's rights organizations limited understanding of the safety concerns and marginalization of the LGBTQ+ community; and divergent understanding of progress and entry points to success.
- Protectionist, adultism, and top-down approach of the children's rights sector.

Conclusion and Recommendations

With a growing global backlash against LGBTQ+ and children's rights—and significant funding cuts from governments as well as major philanthropies—continued, coordinated, and courageous action is essential to protect the rights, safety, and dignity of LGBTQ+ children and youth. Moving forward it is paramount for the children's donors to prioritize the following actions:

- Expand dedicated funding for LGBTQ+ children and youth. Encourage donors to expand support for LGBTQ+ children in the global children's rights agendas.
- Invest in organizational development, not just short-term projects.
- Counter anti-gender narratives by reclaiming child protection and children's rights language from misuse by extremist ideologies.
- Invest in local organizations and LGBTQ+ youth, especially those most impacted by funding volatility.
- Strengthening cross-sector and cross-movement collaborations.

Following six recommendations are put forward for Childhood:

- 1. General Recommendations for Childhood.** Recommend that Childhood better understands LGBTQ+ and child-focused ecosystems in each country; maintain a learning model of program implementation; and stay open in creating content of future programs.
- 2. Reframe the Focus on Sexual Abuse and Violence** by emphasizing prevention and taking a more expansive view of childhood sexual abuse.
- 3. Prioritize Intersections and Points of Collaboration and Strategic Partnerships.** Specifically, five areas of work present opportunities for strategic collaborations: (1) inclusion, including the disability rights movement; (2) sexual and reproductive health and rights; (3) feminist movements; (4) AI and technology innovations; and (5) mental health.
- 4. Take Risk and Innovate New Ways of Creating Strategies, Forming Partnerships, and Funding.** Specifically, expand the definition to LGBTQ+; form a LGBTQ+ Advisory Group; expand Childhood's understanding of risk; co-design and co-create strategies with LGBTQ+ children and youth and local organizations; and shift towards a more youth-centered approach.
- 5. Prioritize Donor Collaboration – Working and Advocating Together.** By advocating, harnessing action, and sharing learning with other funders in philanthropy.
- 6. Focus on Continued Allyship with the LGBTQ+ Community.**