



**USAID**  
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# Programs for Vulnerable Populations

## Displaced Children and Orphans Fund

USAID's Displaced Children and Orphans Fund is one of five Congressionally directed programs that comprise the Programs for Vulnerable Populations:

- Displaced Children and Orphans Fund
- Leahy War Victims Fund
- Victims of Torture Program
- Wheelchair Program
- Disability Program

Each has its own purpose and strategy, but they share a focus on providing assistance to poor and vulnerable populations. Each emphasizes the value of family and community as the first resort in providing protection, care, and support to vulnerable children, civilian victims of war, torture survivors, and people with disabilities.

The U.S. Agency for International Development's Displaced Children and Orphans Fund provides financial and technical assistance for the care and protection of vulnerable children, particularly those who are separated from their families or are at risk of losing family care and protection. In its implementation of DCOF, USAID has given particular attention to children in institutional care, those affected by war, or those on the street, as well as children with disabilities and other disenfranchised or unaccompanied children. Some of these children are orphans who have lost both parents; most are not.

Most DCOF projects aim to either restore or preserve family care for children. DCOF places strong emphasis on strengthening family and community capacity for identifying and responding to the special physical, social, educational, and emotional needs of children.

USAID uses its dedicated resources selectively to support promising projects that yield lessons that can be applied in other situations. It shares those lessons as widely as possible with practitioners, funding organizations, and governments. Since its inception in 1989, DCOF has provided more than \$237 million to support projects for vulnerable children in more than forty-five (45) developing countries.

Global research has shown that poverty is the primary cause of children's vulnerability. However, most economic development programs do not give attention to their effects on children. Consequently, USAID has developed programs whose aim is to strengthen the economic capacities of vulnerable families to provide for their children's needs. It is also participating in a pioneering effort to develop and strengthen national child protection systems, and is helping build networks of key actors to improve policies and use the state-of-the-art in programming to benefit vulnerable children and families. It has played a catalytic role in starting several technical networks.

Over DCOF's two decades of operation, USAID has played a significant role in the development of effective responses to highly vulnerable children. DCOF was the first donor program to support tracing and family reunification for children left unaccompanied after the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, and it supported the development and use of groundbreaking methods for tracing families of young children who were left in institutions after older children were reunited. USAID was the first arm of the U.S. Government to respond to orphaning and other impacts of AIDS on children and families, and it played a key role in developing interagency consensus on the five basic strategies for addressing these issues. In the 1990s, USAID used DCOF funds as a step toward re-establishing relations with Vietnam. In 2002, USAID was the primary funder for family reunification and community reintegration of former child soldiers in Sierra Leone, and it has supported two phases of follow-up interviews with a sample of these children to inform future policy and programming in other countries.

Photo courtesy International Organization for Migration



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