


 A photograph of several children standing in front of a white bus. The bus has "UUSC" and "APC" logos on it. The children are smiling and waving. The image is overlaid with a blue tint.

Global Fund for Children in Europe and Eurasia

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Global Fund for Children (GFC) partners with community-based organizations around the world to help children and youth reach their full potential and advance their rights. By pairing flexible funding with a range of support services and access to networks that can bring about social change, we seed transformative, cost-efficient solutions that help our partners to grow stronger and more effective in their work.

Since 1997, GFC has supported more than 70 community-based organizations in Europe and Eurasia, working across issues such as support for orphans and children living with disabilities, combatting trafficking and gender-based violence, and health education. Guided by our four programmatic focus areas of education, gender equity, youth empowerment, and freedom from violence and exploitation, we continue to unlock the potential of local organizations to transform their communities.

Current initiatives

Combatting trafficking & child marriage in Kyrgyzstan

Global Fund for Children has supported NGOs in Kyrgyzstan since 2007. Kyrgyzstan is one of the poorest countries in the world, with few economic opportunities for young people. Kyrgyz girls and young women are often forced by criminal gangs into sexual and economic slavery in Kyrgyzstan or in other countries. Some parents consider their daughters commodities that they can trade or sell into marriage. In many local communities, “bride kidnapping” – when another family steals a girl to be married – is viewed as a long-standing Kyrgyz tradition.

Our partners provide direct services to affected children and youth, working to reduce risk and, in some cases, intervening in small communities to prevent a child marriage or kidnapping. Our partners work with local authorities, schools, and one-on-one family interventions to raise awareness of these harmful practices and allow girls to stay in school and pursue education and employment. GFC’s flexible funding has helped our Kyrgyz partners by providing stable funds for essential operating expenses, while GFC’s supplementary gaps have helped bring the partners closer together to train each other’s staffs and share successful practices in combatting trafficking and child marriage.

Girls empowerment in the United Kingdom

Following the 2008 economic crisis, the British government started significantly cutting social services (so-called “austerity” measures), which affected local support for charities across the country. The tumultuous Brexit process has made many youth in the UK uncertain about their future education, employment, and quality of life. Those from marginalized communities – such as first-generation immigrants, asylum seekers, Muslim youth, and youth of color – feel especially threatened by their portrayals in the media and shifts in popular opinion about immigration and the contribution of immigrants to UK society. Many young people worry that a breakdown in social services and communities is leading to a rise in gang and other violence – 2018 had the highest number of stabbings in nearly a decade, and many involved young, recent immigrants.

In the UK, GFC partners supported in partnership with Estée Lauder Companies focus on girls’ education and empowerment, and often work with immigrants, asylum seekers, and youth of color. Our partners provide services to fight against harmful cultural practices such as female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/FGC), gender-based violence, and discrimination in the larger education and employment sphere. Our UK partners also work to keep girls and young women out of gangs and criminal activities and to provide positive education and employment opportunities through social enterprises, creative expression, internships, and mentoring programs.

Looking ahead: strategic directions for the future

Global Fund for Children is committed to continuing our support to locally led, innovative, and strategically aligned child- and youth-centered organizations that work on the intersections of education, gender equity, youth empowerment, and freedom from violence and exploitation. We seek to expand and deepen our impact in the following areas.

Strengthening support networks for migrants in southeastern Europe

Although the number of asylum applications in EU countries has declined since the peaks of 2015 and 2016, the EU still received over 600,000 asylum applications in 2018. Refugees fleeing their homes experience loss, poverty, exploitation, and violence, both on the road and in their destination countries, where they often face limited access to education, employment, and health and psychosocial services. Children and youth, particularly girls and children with disabilities, face increased risks such as child trafficking, sexual abuse and exploitation, discrimination, child labor, gender-based violence,



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and early marriage. Many refugees are also denied services that are required by local law.

Migration is a cross-border issue but communities and NGOs often feel that they are facing these challenges on their own. By applying GFC's experience in strengthening networks and investing in existing (but mostly unfunded) networks of NGOs in southeastern Europe, we can strengthen the support system for migrants at the community, national, and regional level. To this end, GFC will support and develop organizations in this cluster of countries focusing on addressing the needs of migrant children.

Promoting social inclusion in southeastern Europe

Despite decades of international and domestic aid programs aimed at the Roma community in southeastern Europe, the majority of Roma in countries such as Serbia, Romania, Moldova, and Ukraine remain excluded from educational, social, and employment opportunities in their communities. Few Roma children attend school as older children and many Roma girls get married and start having children in their early teens.

Discrimination against Roma in schools is a significant problem and a barrier to academic achievement, but GFC partners have demonstrated success at overcoming these challenges. GFC partner Institute for Rural Initiatives (IRI) in Moldova responded to this issue by introducing a volunteer training program for teachers and administrators, while closely monitoring tutoring sessions and getting feedback from teachers and students. This balanced approach has increased Roma school attendance and achievement at participating schools. Both of IRI's approaches are key to rural community development, as acceptance of Roma in the community and an increase in engagement in social life by Roma families are the key to rural community development.

IRI has also learned that to be successful, it must include both Roma and non-Roma in its programming. IRI bases its school voucher support on family income-level and background, not on ethnicity. This is an advantage when introducing the program to Roma and non-Roma from the community, and it allows the organization to also serve poor non-Roma from challenging backgrounds.

GFC sees potential in using this program model to include other marginalized populations, such as refugees, orphans, children living with disabilities, and youth in conflict with the law. GFC partners in Ukraine, Orphan's Future and Kyiv Children and Youth Support Center, have used a similar model to encourage employers to hire orphans or young adults living with disabilities. Given these examples of promising local initiatives, social inclusion at the community and national level may be more successful if programs do not target marginalized populations by their unique identities but rather see them as part of a larger group that has been historically and systematically excluded.

Integrating IDPs and promoting citizenship in countries affected by conflict

Both Georgia and Ukraine have experienced geopolitical violence since the break-up of the Soviet Union and have undergone political and civic revolutions in the past 15 years. Wars with Russia in both countries have led to large numbers of internally displaced people (IDPs), while political upheavals, corruption, and economic instability have traumatized or demoralized many people, particularly youth. Georgia and Ukraine face a common challenge of convincing young people to stay and invest their lives and in their communities.

Grassroots NGOs are forming in response to these challenges, working to integrate IDPs and inspire vulnerable youth to engage in their communities. For example, GFC has identified a Ukrainian NGO that was forced out of its original home in eastern Ukraine and moved to the western city of Ivano-Frankivsk, where it has prioritized the integration of youth IDPs, particularly through micro-finance initiatives.

Back in eastern Ukraine, two 18-year-old activists formed their own NGO in their small city close to the frontlines of the Ukraine-Russia conflict, where they are developing a strategy for community development for their town. New grassroots NGOs are also working with orphans and youth living with disabilities, who continue to be excluded from full participation in their communities. These NGOs would benefit from GFC's experience of matching more nascent organizations with more experienced organizations for mentoring, and from GFC's direct funding for their cooperation and learning together.

Empowering LGBTI youth

According to a recent study by IGLA, LGBTI communities in Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, and Armenia are experiencing physical violence and harassment in their communities. Bullying and other forms of violence against LGBTI children and youth is widespread. Moldova, for example, adopted the Law on Ensuring Equality in 2012, but equality and inclusion are still a long way from becoming a reality for the LGBTI community: two thirds of Moldovans believe that LGBTI people should be kicked out of the country. The situation in Ukraine is very similar: although the Ukrainian government has tried to adopt EU standards of equality, the LGBTI community, especially youth, still faces severe discrimination and violence.

Current funders of LGBTI organizations in Europe and Eurasia tend to prioritize local and in-country work, but many LGBTI organizations could benefit from working more closely with regional partners to support their advocacy and coalition building. Funders have not prioritized the sharing of these experiences, leaving LGBTI organizations to continue working on their own under challenging circumstances. GFC's model of strengthening networks and exchanging staff and information would improve the capacity of LGBTI organizations in these countries to reduce violence and discrimination in their communities for LGBTI youth.



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